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Narrating Career in Social Entrepreneurship: Experiences of Social Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to contribute to the scholarship on career success within the social entrepreneurship context. Based on the career accounts of eighteen social entrepreneurs in Malaysia, the study's findings provide a nuanced perspective of the Career Success Framework and explicate career success for social entrepreneurs as multifaceted across personal and social goals. The findings provide nuance to how the four broad dimensions of the Career Success Framework (material concerns, social relations, learning and pursuing one's own projects) are experienced and perceived in the social entrepreneurship context. The emergent career success framework of social entrepreneurs suggests that perceived career success is appraised with nine sub-dimensions captured within the broad dimensions of the Career Success Framework in ways that challenge taken-for-granted assumptions in careers research, while also highlighting the tensions social entrepreneurs face.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurs, Career Success Framework, Subjective experiences, Social entrepreneurship

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Introduction

Social entrepreneurship is a growing phenomenon, gaining the attention of scholars, policymakers, funders, and the media. Social entrepreneurship is broadly defined as addressing social issues with market mechanisms (Mair, Battilana, and Cardenas 2012) and thus growing the number and activities of social ventures is seen as vital for sustainable development and to reduce the strain on welfare budgets (Littlewood and Holt 2018). Consequently, the extant research has focused on who becomes a social entrepreneur (e.g., Bargsted et al. 2013; Cohen, Kaspi-Baruch, and Katz 2019; Stephan and Drencheva 2017) and why (e.g., Bacq, Hartog, and Hoogendoorn 2016; Christopoulos and Vogl 2015; Germak and Robinson 2014) in an effort to promote social entrepreneurship as a career choice and provide appropriate support.

While the existing literature provides significant insights into why and how individuals start their social entrepreneurship careers in terms of their motivations, the understanding of social entrepreneurship careers is limited. *Career* refers to "the individually-perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of a person's life" (Hall 1976, p. 4). Thus, a career perspective on social entrepreneurship includes not only entry into social entrepreneurship, potentially accidentally, but continuously choosing social entrepreneurship as an occupation based on individuals' perceptions and evaluations as a subjective experience. Yet, little is known about how individuals already engaged in social entrepreneurship evaluate their careers as appropriate and successful, and thus continuously confirm their career choice.

Investigating how social entrepreneurs subjectively evaluate their own careers is important to enhance the current understanding of why individuals persist in their social entrepreneurial activities despite adversity and challenges for their ventures (e.g., Renko 2013) and at significant personal costs (Dempsey and Sanders 2010), or why they may leave social ventures (Powell and Baker 2017), potentially to pursue other careers. While there are broader streams of research on careers outside of entrepreneurship (e.g., Arthur and Rousseau 1996; Gubler, Arnold, and Coombs 2014; Hall 2004; Mainiero and Sullivan 2005) or on careers in commercial entrepreneurship (e.g., Tlaiss 2019; Zikic and Ezzedeen 2015), they do not reflect the career experience of social entrepreneurs adequately because careers are contextualised and anchored in a specific social space (Collin 2006). At the same time, by its very nature of combining social and commercial elements as hybrid organisations (Mair, Battilana, and Cardenas 2012) and the risk and uncertainty embedded in such combination (e.g., Renko 2013), social entrepreneurship challenges taken-for-granted career assumptions in commercial entrepreneurship and in other non-entrepreneurial occupations.

This study aims to explore how social entrepreneurs evaluate their careers as successful from their own perspectives. Based on the narratives of 18 social entrepreneurs from Malaysia, an interpretive phenomenological approach, which emphasises the meanings and explanations that individuals attribute to their experiences (Cope 2005), was adopted to investigate career success as perceived by social entrepreneurs. Building on the Career Success Framework (Mayrhofer et al. 2016), this study explicates how social entrepreneurs evaluate their careers as successful across four dimensions: material concerns, learning, social relations, and pursuing one's own projects.

The study's findings have several implications for research. First, we introduce careers and the Career Success Framework as a new theoretical lens to investigate not only why individuals

enter into social entrepreneurship but also why they continue to engage with social entrepreneurship, thus moving beyond the extant focus on traits, values and identities, and allowing for a broader engagement with the social entrepreneurship process. Second, our findings showcase how tensions emerging from hybrid organising can be experienced at the individual level. Third, social entrepreneurs' experiences of tensions between personal and organisational needs also raise questions about the sustainability of human capital in social entrepreneurship and its inclusiveness. Finally, our application of the Career Success Framework to a new context (i.e., social entrepreneurship) reveals novel insights into how the four dimensions of the framework are interpreted by individuals in different ways than originally conceptualises.

Theoretical Background

Social entrepreneurship as hybrid organising

In an effort to address social or environmental issues, such as poverty and ecological degradation, individuals and communities engage in social entrepreneurship to catalyse positive change through market-based mechanisms (Mair et al. 2012). From this perspective, social ventures can be seen as hybrid organisations that combine institutional logics from different social domains (Battilana and Lee 2014; Doherty et al. 2014; Saebi et al. 2019). Institutional logics are broadly defined as a social domain's organising principles (Friedland and Alford 1991) or rules of the game (Thornton and Ocasio 2008). They are taken-for-granted social prescriptions and templates that convey shared understanding of what is considered legitimate and acceptable in terms of goals, organising forms, and practices in a distinct social domain (Friedland and Alford 1991; Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012). For example, not-for-profit organisations are guided by a development or social welfare logic which emphasises a mission to help disadvantaged groups, cooperation, and interaction with a diverse range of stakeholders to gain support, resources, and influence

authorities. On the other hand, a market logic, which emphasises profit maximisation and competition, guides commercial ventures. If institutional logics represent the rules of the game (Thornton and Ocasio 2008) then combining multiple institutional logics means that social entrepreneurs and social ventures simultaneously play multiple games which may not necessarily follow the same rules and reward the same actions. Thus, social ventures and social entrepreneurs face tensions and contradictions in relation to what is acceptable and desirable across many aspects of the venturing process (for reviews see Battilana and Lee 2014; Doherty et al. 2014; Saebi et al. 2019).

While tensions emerging from hybrid organising likely exist at the individual and venture levels, most of the extant research so far has focused on the organisational level. Social entrepreneurship research so far has investigated the negative effects of tensions in relation to mission drift (e.g., Ramus and Vacarro 2017) and performance of social ventures (e.g., Battilana et al. 2015), as well as how these tensions can be managed through business models and governance mechanisms (e.g., Ebrahim et al. 2014). However, there is only emerging research on how individuals in social ventures experience tensions, for example in relation to their skills (Chandra and Shang 2017) and identities (Besharov 2014). One area where tensions may emerge at the individual levels is social entrepreneurs' careers and how they define career success for themselves.

Careers Success

The mainstream career literature focuses on careers as planned behaviors and predictable career advancement (e.g. Cadenas et al. 2018; Modestino et al. 2019). Traditionally, objective factors, such as salary, position and promotion, have been highlighted to evaluate career success. However,

career success can also be based on a subjective evaluation of tangible and intangible characteristics (Arthur, Khapova, and Wilderom 2005; Shockley et al. 2016). According to Ng and Feldman (2014, p. 170), subjective career success involves "individuals' perceptual evaluations of, and affective reactions to, their careers". Broader careers research suggests that such subjective evaluations can involve diverse dimensions, such as recognition, meaningful work, influence, authenticity, personal life, growth and development, and satisfaction (Shockley et al. 2016).

One broad framework that can provide insights into the dimensions that social entrepreneurs possibly use to perceive and evaluate their careers is the Career Success Framework (CSF from now on for short) (Mayrhofer et al. 2016), which considers the diversity of economic, cultural, and institutional contexts. This framework synthesises insights from careers research into four career success dimensions: material concerns, learning, social relations, and pursuing one's own projects.

The material concerns dimension highlights the value of survival, comfort, affluence and status. A successful career not only enables meeting basic necessities for individuals and their families (financial security), but also captures incentives received, rate of progression, and social status (financial achievement) (Mayrhofer et al. 2016). This dimension is in line with other studies that consider financial success as a key element of career success (e.g., Gattiker and Larwood 1986; Kets De Vries 2010).

The learning dimension of the CSF suggests that individuals are born to grow, and learning is an "ongoing, sustainable and renewable form of career success" (Mayrhofer et al. 2016, p. 199). This is in line with past studies that show that learning experiences are crucial for one to reach their full potential and thus career success (Dries et al. 2008).

The social relations dimension highlights humans as social beings where individuals' actions relate to the outer world (Mayrhofer et al. 2016). First, individuals value careers that have meaning and purpose in their immediate social environment, such as co-workers and clients, and in the broader community (Mayrhofer et al. 2016). Other research also specifies that career success has a "wider connotation of success as a human being" (Kets De Vries 2010, p. 5) as serving communities and engaging in work that is socially valued (Dries, Pepermans, and Carlier 2008; Shockley et al. 2016). Second, appreciation and positive feedback as ongoing quests in one's career journey (positive relationships) (Mayrhofer et al. 2016) is also identified, highlighting that individuals want to be noticed for their work. Other studies share similar insights whereby career success means approval and appreciation of one's achievements by others (Dries, Pepermans, and Carlier 2008; Kets De Vries 2010; Shockley et al. 2016). Finally, the dimension also considers achieving balance between work and nonwork life (work-life balance) (e.g., Mainiero and Gibson 2018; Mainiero and Sullivan 2005; Wille, Fruyt, and Feys 2013; Zhou et al. 2013), enabling authenticity and opportunity to experience a coherent whole.

The final dimension of the CSF is the pursuit of one's own projects, which includes founding one's own enterprise or being able to pursue one's own projects within work (Mayrhofer et al. 2016). For example, individuals value career success in terms of being able to create something innovative and extraordinary (Dries, Pepermans, and Carlier 2008).

Thus far, experiences and evaluations of career success among employed workers have received the highest scholarly attention (e.g. Hirschi et al. 2018; Shockley et al. 2016). There is also emergent interest in commercial entrepreneurial careers where success is directly associated with the performance of new ventures (e.g., Hytti 2010; Tlaiss 2019; Zikic and Ezzedeen 2015). Research in commercial entrepreneurship highlights the pursuit of opportunities (Ahl and Marlow

2012) as well as the privileges of individual agency in taking advantage of market opportunities (Marlow and Swail 2014; Tlaiss 2019). In summary, evaluations of career success for both the employed and commercial entrepreneurs are largely within the boundaries of personal goals. However, there is a dearth of knowledge on career success within the social entrepreneurship context, where catalysing positive social change is key and thus career goals may be beyond the boundaries of personal goals.

Career Success in Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurs are individuals who start, lead, and manage social ventures on their own accounts and risks. Theoretical and empirical studies show that social entrepreneurs are motivated by prosocial values, motives, identities, and emotions to start social ventures (for a review see Stephan and Drencheva 2017). Such individuals are attracted to social entrepreneurship because they perceive a fit between their motives, values, identities, traits, and skills with the purpose of the organisation they start. Based on their self-knowledge and knowledge of the occupation, and potentially prompted and encouraged by others, individuals prepare for this occupational choice and self-select if they indeed perceive a fit. Once individuals are in the role of a social entrepreneur and experience the responsibilities and demands of such work, they may withdraw from this occupational choice due to a lack of fit or continue confirming their choice (Baron, Franklin, and Hmieleski 2016; Schneider 1987), turning it into a long-term career. Thus, a fundamental tenet of a career perspective of social entrepreneurship is that a successful career is one that matches the individual with the work (e.g., Dawis 2002; Dawis and Lofquist 1984; Holland 1997) which is a reciprocal process in which the individual and the occupation strive to maximise the consistency between the person's psychological and physical needs and the skills and qualities required by the work (Swanson and Schneider 2013; Leung 2008). Thus, developing a social entrepreneurship

career is not a single one-off choice to start a social venture, which in some cases may be accidental and not perceived at the start as a career, but a choice that is continuously confirmed or challenged as individuals engage in social entrepreneurship activities and evaluate how successful their career is.

Given that the social entrepreneur is the key person who initiates and manages the social venture, social entrepreneurs' perceived career success has critical implications for the sustainability of social ventures in delivering social value. Social entrepreneurs' perceived unsuccessful careers may do more harm than good, especially if their social ventures support vulnerable communities. Withdrawal from social entrepreneurship due to perceptions of unsuccessful career may break the trust between the social venture and their beneficiary communities, and further hamper the future engagement of other social organisations with these communities (e.g., Tracey et al. 2011). Thus, understanding social entrepreneurs' careers based on their lived experiences and subjective perceptions is crucial for individuals and for social ventures.

Building on subjective career success, social entrepreneurs can evaluate their careers positively if they have access to recognition and opportunities, such as book deals (e.g., Dempsey and Sanders 2010), speaking engagements, or awards (e.g., from the Schwab or Skoll Foundations). However, they may also subjectively experience their careers as unsuccessful due to the tensions (e.g., Battilana and Lee 2014), challenges (e.g., Renko 2013), mission drift (Ramus and Vaccaro 2017) and legitimacy issues (e.g., Pache and Santos 2013) that social entrepreneurs face. Indeed, to address these challenges, social entrepreneurs play multiple roles: managerial role to lead and operate a social venture, entrepreneurial role as an economic agent, and activist role to entice institutional support (Christopoulos and Vogl 2015), which may leave some social entrepreneurs feeling inauthentic and lacking meaning in their work. This requirement to play

multiple roles as part of the social entrepreneurship journey is also a unique condition, rarely captured in research with individuals with more traditional careers. Additionally, social entrepreneurs may experience negative impact on their wellbeing and personal relationships (Dempsey and Sanders 2010). These experiences suggest that social entrepreneurs may evaluate their careers in conflicting ways. Yet, it is not clear what dimensions social entrepreneurs consider valuable from their own perspectives to evaluate their careers and how exactly they perceive their careers, despite careers being a deeply personal and subjective phenomenon.

While the CSF provides broad dimensions that individuals across different contexts can employ to appraise their own careers, the framework has not been applied in the context of social entrepreneurship. Due to the tensions of hybrid organising (Battilana and Lee 2014), it is difficult to directly apply career insights from careers research broadly or from research on careers in commercial entrepreneurship (e.g., Tlaiss 2019; Zikic and Ezzedeen 2015). Additionally, social entrepreneurs may lack the conditions required for sustainable achievement of career goals. Such conditions include viable investments where individual, organisational or societal resources are not overstretching; long-term (career) strategy which fits with one's values and beliefs; and a holistic foundation where other life domains within which one is embedded (e.g., family) are encompassed. In this context, the common narratives of social entrepreneurs as playing multiple roles to do good at their own personal expense (Dempsey and Sanders 2010) and in highly unfavourable and challenging conditions (Petrovskaya and Mirakyan 2018; Renko 2013) with limited organisational resources (Di Domenico, Haugh, and Tracey 2010) highlight that their career experiences are unique and need further investigation.

One particularly prominent area where social entrepreneurs are distinct from individuals pursuing more traditional careers is the degree of career planning. The mainstream career literature

focuses on careers as planned behaviors and predictable career advancement (e.g., Cadenas et al. 2018; Modestino et al. 2019). However, social entrepreneurship is a phenomenon of "emergence" where individuals seize opportunities to be problem solvers (Chandra and Paras 2020). The emergent nature of social entrepreneurship which involves opportunity development (e.g., Corner and Ho 2010; Perrini, Vurro, and Costanzo 2010), especially in challenging contexts (e.g., Chandra and Paras 2020), features high levels of risk and uncertainty with fewer opportunities for a carefully planned career.

Method

An interpretive phenomenological approach was employed to investigate how social entrepreneurs subjectively evaluate their careers. This approach seeks "to understand the subjective nature of 'lived experience' from the perspective of those who experience it, by exploring the meanings and explanations that individuals attribute to their experiences" (Cope 2005, p. 168). This approach is appropriate for this study because of its aim to explore the meanings that individuals attribute to the phenomenon of interest which they experience (Patton 2002). The phenomenological approach also emphasises the commonalities of a phenomenon across participants' experiences to build a foundation for understanding the phenomenon (Moustakas 1994), which is career success in our study.

Context of the Study

This study took place in Malaysia, a relevant yet under-represented context to explore social entrepreneurship from a career perspective. Social entrepreneurs in Malaysia are relatively young: 36% of are between 31 and 40 years old. Majority of social ventures in Malaysia (54%) are owned and led by women. Finally, social entrepreneurs in Malaysia are highly educated: 43% of them have at least a degree, while further 40% have a postgraduate qualification, significantly higher

than the general workforce. In Malaysia, most social ventures operate as micro enterprises, generating an annual revenue of RM250,000 (approximately GBP45,750) and employing seven full-time staff and four part-time staff on average. Most (66%) are based in the Klang Valley, Malaysia's central economic zone. In this locality, social ventures have increased access to resources, including but not limited to financial and social capital. Social ventures in Malaysia are active across multiple social issues, including creating employment opportunities (34%), supporting vulnerable and marginalised communities (31%), improving a particular community (27%), protecting the environment (24%), promoting education and literacy (21%), as well as improving health and wellbeing (20%) (British Council 2018).

The Malaysian government has been supportive of social ventures, particularly through the establishment of an agency that has social ventures in its main mandate: Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre (MaGIC). The key policy document related to social ventures, *Malaysian Social Enterprise Blueprint 2015-2018*, was released in 2015. The Malaysian government also introduced the Impact Driven Enterprise Accreditation in 2017, which was relaunched as Social Enterprise Accreditation in 2019, to facilitate social entrepreneurship development in the country. In 2020, MYR10 million (approximately GBP1.89 million) from the annual national budget was allocated to support social ventures through MaGIC (Tariq 2019). Government support, together with initiatives by other ecosystem players, such as foundations and impact investors, has resulted in Malaysia ranking 9th in terms of support for social ventures amongst 45 countries, compared to the United Kingdom (7th), Singapore (2nd), and Hong Kong (9th) (Thomson Reuters Foundation 2016). Despite these efforts, social entrepreneurship is still a relatively new concept with limited mainstream awareness and engagement in Malaysia. In fact, Malaysia has one of the lowest rates of social entrepreneurship activity amongst economies in

Southeast Asia (Bosma et. al. 2016). This makes Malaysia an interesting context to study social entrepreneurs' careers and to explore their experiences of career success.

Participants

The research team interviewed eighteen social entrepreneurs in Malaysia (MSEs) who worked towards addressing a wide range of social issues, including the refugee crisis, education issues, unethical employment, poverty issues of indigenous and marginalised communities, and environmental issues. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they had rich experience as a social entrepreneur *after entry into social entrepreneurship*. To be eligible to participate, participants were required to have founded the social venture and managed it for at least one year with employees. The researchers reached potential participants who met the criteria through emails. The profile of participants is summarised in Table 1 with pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants. Most participants have years of experience in social entrepreneurship, ranging from one to eight years, with an average social entrepreneurship career experience of 4 years. In terms of education, all of them had at least a Bachelor's degree, where 60% of them received their higher education outside of Malaysia. Only four participants had business-related degrees (e.g., accounting and finance). The profile of the participants was consistent with Bosma et al. (2016)'s observation that in general social entrepreneurs tend to be young and highly educated as well as with British Council's (2018) findings on who social entrepreneurs in Malaysia are.

Insert Table 1 here

Data Collection

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant in person. On average, interviews last approximately 60 minutes and all of the interviews were recorded with the participant's consent. The interview protocol was designed to examine the lived experiences of social entrepreneurs in relation to their engagement in social entrepreneurship from initial motivations, in some cases going back to their childhood, and entry into social entrepreneurship to current experiences and perceptions of success within the social venture as founders, leaders, and managers, within the social entrepreneurship ecosystem as members of the community, and outside of their work as individuals with families, personal interests, and other nonwork activities. Questions were open-ended to guide the interview and allowed for probing, checking, and clarifying information. This, the overall discussion with each participant remained consistent while follow-up questions varied, depending on the unique accounts of each participant. All interviews were conducted in English, a widely used language in Malaysia (Thirusanku and Melor 2012), and transcribed.

Data Analysis

The anonymised data was stored and analysed using NVivo. We started data analysis by familiarising ourselves with the data by reading each transcript several times. Afterward, the formal analysis process started with open coding that captured the career experiences of the MSEs in their own words as first-order categories (Gioia et al. 2013). At this stage, we engaged in constant comparison between first-order categories within transcripts and across transcripts to ensure similar experiences were grouped together (Miles and Huberman 1994; Gioia et al. 2013). As open coding continued, we also engaged in axial coding to identify second-order themes and dimensions that could allow for first-order categories to be aggregated in theoretically meaningful

ways (Gioia et al. 2013). At this stage, constant comparison was also employed at the level of second-order themes comparing them to one another.

While analysing the data, we searched for theoretical frameworks that could provide explanations of the emerging empirical insights. After some data-theory iteration, we identified the Career Success Framework (CSF) (Mayrhofer et al. 2016) as an appropriate framework that could capture the participants' experiences in nuanced and meaningful ways through its umbrella dimensions. Hence, the framework was adopted to guide data analysis. Thus, we followed the suggestion by Jackson and Mazzei's (2011; 2018) to inform the analysis by borrowing theoretical concepts from the literature, which enabled the integration of theory and data. However, the dimensions of the CSF were not blindly applied and imposed onto the experiences of the social entrepreneurs. For example, the CSF suggests 'work-life balance' is one of the key career success sub-dimensions. The open coding of the interview data suggested that work-life balance was not language used by most of the MSEs. After constant comparison and data-theory iteration, this secondary code was revised to 'work-life integration is experienced' to more accurately capture the perception of blurred boundaries between work and nonwork domains, as well as the MSE's career experience of work-life integration.

Figure 1 illustrates the data structure and the movement from first-order categories as the language of the participants to second-order themes as theory-driven career success sub-dimensions. It represents the core dimensions used by the MSEs to subjectively evaluate their careers.

Insert Figure 1 here

Trustworthiness

We adopted two strategies to ensure trustworthiness of the findings. First, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), we kept a shared reflective journal to document the research process, observations during fieldwork, interactions with the participants and reflections. This record of the research team's thought processes during fieldwork allowed us to be mindful of issues to take note of and potential areas to probe further in upcoming interviews. The research team also read through the reflective journal again before formal data analysis to identify any potential bias, which was not an issue in our case. Second, participants were invited for a reflective event where the research team shared the preliminary findings to check if the analysis accurately reflected their experiences. We also shared the preliminary findings with all participants in writing for further comments and feedback.

Findings

This section describes how the participating MSEs perceived career success based on the four broad dimensions of the Career Success Framework (i.e., material concerns, learning, social relations, and pursuing one's own projects) in the social entrepreneurship context through relevant sub-dimensions and nuanced interpretations. To exemplify and visualise the findings, illustrative supporting quotations from the transcripts are provided. Table 2 summarises the findings.

Insert Table 2 here

Social relations

Social relations were the most prominent career success dimension in the narratives of the participants, which was manifested in three specific ways: positive impact, positive relationships, and work-life integration as described below.

Everything is about positive impact

Catalysing positive impact in relation to a specific societal issue was the foundation for all of the participants in subjectively evaluating their careers as successful. The MSEs considered as success their demonstrated persistence in pursuing their goals in addressing specific social challenges and continuing to take action. If the proposed social business model did not work out as planned, they were persistent in trying out alternative solutions. In most cases, opting for conventional career or returning to their former employment career when encountering barriers in delivering intended positive impact through their social venture was not an option:

> I was really excited about moving [back] home, and trying this out, because I knew that this problem needed to be addressed. I was not sure whether my solution could be the key to address this issue. But I was hopeful… I love that I care about these issues this deeply because it allows me to continue pushing through the difficulty without even thinking about it. I don't even have second thoughts, "Oh, should I do something else?". If this doesn't work, I'll try another method… [in the] past two years, I was like, "Ok, this doesn't work, let's try that. Ok, that doesn't work, let's try this". [Chen]

Positive relationships, where my work and I are accepted with encouragement

Unlike employed professionals whose perception of career success is often associated with appreciation by their supervisors and co-workers (Mayrhofer et al. 2016; Shockley et al. 2016), the MSEs identified their family members and beneficiary communities as the 'important others'.

For the MSEs, acceptance and positive feedback contributed to a perception of career success after they had already started their journeys. The participants highlighted the importance of acceptance, not even appreciation, by their family members, especially their parents, in perceiving their careers as successful. Without parental acceptance of their career choice, the MSEs found it cognitively and emotionally exhausting to cope with parents' expectations to consider their careers as successful:

> Being Asians, we have been growing up in this culture. There are those expectations for you to go into a more traditional, more secure, more stable career path, and that was definitely the path my parents put me on. It's not just me, other co-founders are experiencing this too. Our experiences with our parents are very similar… And for us, it's about coping with that disappointment in whatever way we can by supporting each other because we didn't get our parents' blessing. That resistance is always going to be there. [Min]

The acceptance and recognition by the local community, especially beneficiaries, also served as a key indicator of career success. As described below, positive feedback on their work or even increased engagement from beneficiaries became an indicator of success in their social entrepreneurship career journeys:

> I'm really happy when I see the student who used to come only once in a while, now they come every day, their attendance is much better. And yeah, it's good to see their progress. When you say, "Oh, we're gonna do movie night", they're so happy, and they all come. And see that whatever we do makes them happy, it really helps, so that's great. [Sue]

As social ventures and the social entrepreneurship network in Malaysia tend to be small, the recognition among peers both within the team and from other social ventures allowed the MSEs to perceive career success more readily. Moreover, the MSEs also shared that 'a pat on the back' within the team or from external parties was an important signpost of success during their social entrepreneurship career journey. This was especially the case for the MSEs who worked on social issues whereby short-term impact (success) was less visible, such as environmental issue, like the one Mohan initiated:

> Many times we actually have that chat, as a part of the management team and leadership team, "Are what we're doing really that impactful? Or are we just... in Malay, we say '*syiok sendiri*', means that 'floating our own boat'?"... But it's the motivation though, it's the motivation. Really, like some people look at us and like "Wow! You've done so much!" but we're like, "No, no, no, we can do so much more." … And sometimes we're like, "Okay, we are doing quite good, now, let's pat ourselves on the back"… I think it's healthy, it is much needed, and you always need to have that balance. [Mohan]

Work-life integration is experienced

Contrasting perceptions of work-life balance in terms of career success were observed among the MSEs. While some MSEs were delighted with the highly integrated work and nonwork spheres in their social entrepreneurship career, others also recognised the long-term negative implication of such work-life integration on their career.

Some MSEs perceived integration of work and nonwork spheres as an indicator of career success. They enjoyed attending to matters related to the social venture anytime, which was deeply rooted into their personal values and allowed them to be authentic. They shared that the social

entrepreneurship career was ingrained into their lives. The MSEs worked on social issues they genuinely cared about; thus they did not seem to perceive work as a demand to be balanced with other spheres of their lives:

> I believe in work-life integration, if you are passionate for something, your work is your life, your life is your work. If you are passionate in it [sic], you wish to be out on work all the time, so that you can have a life. (laugh) I don't believe in work-life balance that much… My passion is about having more people to understand the issue, and have more people to understand about social entrepreneurship… that's my passion. And if I can integrate that passion into my life, whatever I'm doing will then be aligned… [Yuan]

Such work-life integration as an indicator of career success also meant blurred emotional, psychological, and sometimes even physical boundaries between work and nonwork. The MSEs who had focused entirely on the social mission continued to engage in work outside of their work zone and/or working hours. For example, the MSEs utilised their weekends to visit their beneficiaries on a casual basis; they made arrangements to visit other social entrepreneurs and potential collaborators during their personal holidays:

> Work-life balance? Non-existent (laughter). It's hard, it's hard. Because of the work that I am doing, personally, it resonates with my [me], I feel my larger purpose in calling. So I often feel the work-life balance [boundary] is very blurred. Because even in my free time, I could be going for events that are work-related, I'm talking to people work-related stuff, but I don't feel like I'm working. For example, I was in Cape Town two weeks ago for a workshop, one week for work, one week for leisure. But the one week for leisure also I was meeting maker-spaces people, I was meeting other up-cyclists, having coffee. For me,

it was like a holiday. But some of my friends were like "Dude, why are you meeting all of these work-related people?" But I was like "No man, I had awesome [time]". I was just happy to be there, talking to them, chatting. I didn't have a work agenda… Because I think my value system is so closely linked to the work that I do, that line gets blurred quite a lot. [Mohan]

In general, most MSEs demonstrated high tolerance of intrusion of social venture matters into their nonwork life. As community engagement activities often happened outside of the typical 9am-to-5pm weekday schedule, the MSEs tended to operate within a context with flexible time structures. Most of them shared that their bottom line was to get sufficient rest and they were somewhat flexible in the time boundary between work and nonwork, as Kiong whose social venture aimed to address poverty issues among the indigenous community described below:

In terms of boundaries, in terms of hours, I don't expect that. I don't mind working till 2 am, to get things done, doesn't matter. As long as I have a little bit of time [to rest]… Let's say I want to take a break today, 12 to 3 (pm) in the afternoon, I can. If I have that, I am re-energised, I can do whatever throughout the day, it doesn't matter. That's my philosophy, as long as [I] got a little bit time to myself to just recharge a bit, I am fine. [Kiong]

However, while most MSEs did not consider blurred work-nonwork boundaries an issue, some MSEs found it overwhelming when their nonwork spheres were occupied by work-related matters. Interestingly, although MSEs desired their social ventures and social missions to be widely recognised as a clear indication of career success, some of them found it cognitively

exhausting when all their conservations were related solely to social entrepreneurship. They expressed that they would appreciate if social entrepreneurship was not the only topic for a change:

> Because I'm doing something so different, every time I meet [new] people, they ask "What is ABC?". I'm more than happy to share, but there are days where I'm like, "I don't want to talk about ABC" (laughs). Well, although I sort of want to talk about ABC all the time, but there are times … So I do have a close group of friends that I can just talk about normal stuff … hang out with them and not talk about work and sort of relax with them. I think having this kind of support system is important. [Yee]

While the MSEs allowed time and physical boundaries between work and nonwork to be blurred, they were mindful of the risk of not having clear emotional boundaries between work and nonwork in the long term. Emotion exhaustion and burnout were commonly identified by the MSEs as potential risks of not being able to separate emotional work demands from their nonwork spheres. This was particularly relevant among MSEs whose social ventures worked with vulnerable populations, such as refugees, marginalised workers, and women.

> When you work with the beneficiaries, when they are in trouble, or when in the situations that you cannot fix, you have to learn how to segregate that feeling, because if you don't, it will actually eat you up. And then you can't talk about sustainability. The sustainability is not just about the environment, is not just about financial [sic], is also about your energy as well. So if you don't preserve the energy and passion, then in 5 years time, you probably [will] not want to do this anymore. [Yuan]

Pursuing one's own projects

Successfully initiating and maintaining a social venture was the next key career success dimension that emerged from the narratives of the MSEs. Closely related to the social relations dimension of career success, where the fundamental indicator of success was solving a social or environmental issue, the MSEs were determined to address the identified social issues by initiating their own projects. In other words, the MSEs took ownership of the social issues and adopted 'social venture' as a 'tool' of problem solving. Hence, embarking on and continuing their social entrepreneurship career. Based on the MSEs' accounts, two sub-dimensions described below emerged.

It started as a social project

When they began their journeys, most of the MSEs did not have a clear intention to start a social venture and pursue a social entrepreneurship career. Whether it was a project started from their universities or during their internship or volunteer engagement, the MSEs took ownership of a specific social issue and became determined to address it. Consequently, they soon started to appreciate social entrepreneurship as a serious option for both addressing the social issue and for their careers. Yee described how she had extended a community initiative during her fellowship into a serious career:

> Well, I only wanted to help Farah, Farah is the other co-founder, to just start it and then, maybe I go and do corporate or whatever. And then again, once you start something, it's very hard to walk away from it, and now it's like our 5th year already and we're still doing it... I decided to stay on as I can see [the] potential in the work that we do… that I started to see [the] difference, the children [are] changing, and [we are] making [an] impact. [Yee]

I founded it, I am responsible

The MSEs recognised that pursuing one's own projects came with accountability and responsibility, especially towards the communities they served. Their decisions were always made within the boundaries of stakeholders' wellbeing. In other words, while they perceived career success from having the autonomy to shape their own social ventures, they were also mindful of balancing their autonomy with the positive impact they had promised to deliver through the initiated project:

> When I first started, I had a very strong idea about what could be done to fix this problem… Being young, there is a lot of pressure to want things to move, and to want to prove yourself quickly and want things to grow quickly. But in social entrepreneurship, there is a huge social responsibility that you have towards getting things right and making sure that everything is well thought out so that unintended negative consequences don't occur. Especially when I am dealing with human, I mean actual people are my beneficiaries. I need to be thoughtful and mindful even if that means I am going to sacrifice the speed of the growth of my company. I spent more than 2 years trying to figure things out, but I think it's worth it. [Chen]

Perceiving career success through the prism of ownership and responsibility, the MSEs continued their social entrepreneurship journeys even when encountering personal and venture challenges. Despite the challenges and barriers, the MSEs were unlikely to 'jump ship' from their social ventures because they acknowledged the potential harm to their communities if they quit. Accordingly, they continued their effort to maintain their perceptions of career success:

> I feel that there [are] so many things that I haven't tested yet in ABC. That's how I see myself right now, as I dig too deep, and I can't run away from it… (chuckles) Because of

> that, I will keep on digging, digging, digging until I have no tools anymore, to dig until the end. So meaning, until I can say that I've tried all the things that I know, till then, I will keep trying. [Ali]

Learning

All MSEs asserted that continuous learning and growing was the key in sustaining a social entrepreneurship career as social issues were continually evolving and the industry was so dynamic. This career success dimension consisted of two sub-dimensions described below.

Social entrepreneurship-related training and learning

Unlike the common path to pursue a career aligned with individuals' technical and professional education, only one of the participants had social entrepreneurship as her minor specialisation in her tertiary education. Furthermore, only a handful of the participants had business-related training before starting their social ventures, while most of the participants had knowledge in other disciplines (e.g., psychology, law, language) that was not related to the social issues they aimed to address. Thus, most MSEs actively engaged in training and learning related to social entrepreneurship to ensure the longevity of their social entrepreneurship careers. They pursued specialised training, organised by social entrepreneurship ecosystem builders locally and internationally, after starting their social ventures and considered it particularly useful for them to develop their skills and competencies in leading and managing a social venture. As Chen shared below, these learning and development opportunities contributed to gaining essential knowledge to maintain and progress the social entrepreneurship career (e.g., impact measurement, development of social business models) but also to extend her network and develop positive

relationships. Such networks offered further learning opportunities, as well as various support from and for each other:

> I applied to a couple of social entrepreneurship programmes in Europe. I was lucky enough to be admitted into the UNLEASH innovation lab in July/August 20xx. It was a two-week programme that really taught me how to bring solution from ideation to execution. That was where I got initial training, how to structure business model, how to think about beneficiaries, how to come up with something that is sustainable in terms of the financial aspect of the business. While I was there, I heard very interesting ideas from other participants…. I was [also] involved in the Women at Google on Tech-stars, Startup Women's Weekend... We win one weekend, and it opens a lot of doors to me. I got connected to MaGIC (Malaysian Global Innovation & Creativity Centre), I got connected to other social entrepreneurs, and other people interested in the [social entrepreneurship] space, so it was very helpful. [Chen]

Learning from mentors

Mentorship with experienced social entrepreneurs was considered a unique learning opportunity in social entrepreneurship careers, contributing to positive evaluations of the career. Unlike employed professionals who tend to seek mentorship within the organisation (Bravo et al. 2017), seeking mentorship externally and even internationally was identified as common learning practice among MSEs. Given that most of the MSEs did not possess a social entrepreneurship background, mentoring opportunities internally were also limited, learning from experienced social entrepreneurs was particularly valuable, while also providing opportunities for positive feedback

and acceptance. Alya shared that her founding team had different mentors for different purposes, guiding and supporting them in different areas in their social entrepreneurship journey:

> We have [a] legal mentor, he was helping us with the shareholders agree[ment], our term sheet. There is also a general mentor. Our business model follows a XYZ agency that is ethical, is called DEF (a social venture outside of Malaysia). The founder started the company when he was 25…he is our mentor now. So he has a call with us every week, is like [to] run through. He said, "now you are in the crucial stage, you started operation, the next 2 years will be crazy for you guys, you will be learning so much, you probably have a lot of questions, I am going to be here to answer all of them". So [it] is really great. Sometimes we have struggles with the cost, this employer said this, how do we respond in such [a] situation? He will tell us, share with us. We have him as the main mentor. [Alya]

Material concerns

None of the MSEs identified material (financial) concerns as the key career success dimension in their social entrepreneurship career, in contrast to employed professionals and commercial entrepreneurs (Kets De Vries 2010; Mayrhofer et al. 2016). To the MSEs, the meanings associated with material concerns had two main manifestations: financial security from a personal perspective and financial achievement from the organisational perspective, that are described below.

Financial security is a long-term goal

All of the MSEs acknowledged that social entrepreneurship was not a financially lucrative career and did not consider financial concerns in the traditional sense as an indicator of success, in contrast to parents and other family members who valued financial gains, as shared by Alya:

> My previous job is very cushy, very comfortable, I had a clear growth [path]way, it paid quite well and this is a very different job. I had some tension with my father, he is like, "Why do you do this? It is very un-sexy to be at ABC agency". So, there was some struggle there. Well, he understands me better now, seeing that we are actually bringing revenue. He is like "Hmm okay…" I understand where he is coming from because he grew up very poor, he doesn't understand. All his life is about giving good life to his kids, to make life easy for us. Now, I have everything. But I am not necessarily choosing that path.

Some of the MSEs funded the social ventures with their personal savings, while the majority of them did not take salaries at the initial stage of the business. Although they recognised the need for short-term personal sacrifices for long-term sustainability of the social ventures, the MSEs highlighted that income was crucial for the sustainability of their own lives in the long run, as they were planning for the future:

> It's a very unconventional route we take… The three of us came from relatively better-off or more well-off backgrounds and that's the reason why we're able to not take a salary. I haven't taken any salary for an entire year... Without my parent's support, I wouldn't have been able to do this. And that was the same for [the] other co-founders… It is definitely very difficult and challenging… You know not having that security, when you're not getting paid for certain work, it really feels like you're not progressing in your career because that reward system is not there. And you have to constantly keep pushing yourself. It's not that money isn't important, it really is. Especially when the three of us are entering our late 20s. And we're also thinking about marriage, we're thinking of starting families, we want to be financially secure in our personal lives. It's not something easy for anyone

> to give up that sense of financial security. All three of us would have been earning [a] decent salary or a more than decent salary in any other job now. That's the sacrifice here, it's not easy and you have to find really good reasons to justify why you're doing this work every day. [Min]

Financial achievement, it's not for me but for the social venture

As described above, pursuing personal financial gain was not the key indicator of subjective career success for the MSEs. However, all of them acknowledged that it was most important for them to work toward the financial sustainability of the social venture, thus allowing them to address the social or environmental issues that had initially motivated their career choice, as Yee, who runs an education-related social venture, pointed out:

> It's more like we see that there's the need, so we start. We don't think so much about the finance stuff but it's very important…Essentially we want to make it free for the students because we know they cannot afford [it]; these are students from the lower socioeconomic background. But then again we don't want to be a charity, to always rely on funds. So when we saw the SE model, we thought this could work for us. We could find ways to generate enough revenue so that we are financially sustainable. [Yee]

Discussion

This study sought to explore the narratives of subjective career success among Malaysian social entrepreneurs (MSEs). The study's findings, guided by the Career Success Framework (Mayrhofer et al. 2016), indicate that MSEs perceive and evaluate their careers as successful across four dimensions: *social relations* as catalysing and seeing the positive impact for others, which is

integrated into the nonwork sphere and relationships with personally significant and venture-relevant others; *pursuing one's own projects* which are transformed into a career with responsibilities for others; *learning* in order to sustain the career; and *material concerns* whereby financial security is a long-term goal with a focus on the social venture, not on individual financial maximisation (see Figure 2). These findings have several core implications for research in social entrepreneurship and careers.

Insert Figure 2 here

First, the findings have implications for social entrepreneurship research by adding careers as a new theoretical lens to explicate not only why individuals start but also maintain their social entrepreneurship activities. While previous studies have focused on social entrepreneurs' personalities, such as values, identities and traits (e.g., Bargsted et al. 2013; Bacq et al. 2016; Stephan and Drencheva 2017), as a static approach to examine why specific individuals become social entrepreneurs, often in comparison to other occupational choices, such as commercial entrepreneurs, this study focuses on careers as a subjective and contextualised perspective. Such a subjective and contextualised perspective is relevant throughout social entrepreneurs' entire journeys whereby they continuously reconfirm or re-evaluate their initial choice in light of adversity, challenges, and discrepancies with expectations. This perspective is also important because it helps to explain how individuals start social ventures as emergent activities or projects driven by a specific social issue and how these emergent activities are continuously re-evaluated to form core elements of a career narrative that retrospectively can be viewed as a planned career trajectory. The study's career perspective suggests that individuals start their social venturing

activities in the form of a project, which is transformed into a career due to their sense of responsibility and accountability to communities of beneficiaries. This career transition is sustained through gaining acceptance and positive feedback from personally significant and venture relevant others, integrating work and nonwork domains, continuously learning and working toward the financial sustainability of the social venture. Thus, the positive subjective evaluations across these dimensions are crucial for social entrepreneurs to continue their activities and enable the social venture to deliver social impact. Future research can investigate what factors enhance or hinder social entrepreneurs' evaluations of career success and how different evaluations shape strategic decisions, including leaving the organisation and succession planning.

Second, our findings present a more nuanced perspective on social entrepreneurs as multidimensional human beings engaged in a challenging phenomenon, thus reflecting the tensions embedded in social entrepreneurship as a process of hybrid organising at the individual level of analysis. Previous research and the media portray social entrepreneurs from a moral and heroic perspective (c.f., Bacq et al. 2016) as driven by their prosocial motivations to make a difference (e.g., Miller et al. 2012; Stephan and Drencheva 2017). While overlaps with prosocial motivation can be seen in our study, our findings also show that social entrepreneurs expect and value not only making a difference, but also being recognised and celebrated for their work, being accepted for the choices they make, and having support and learning opportunities, which are aspects not recognised by research that has focused on motivation so far. These multidimensional expectations of how social entrepreneurs subjectively evaluate their careers as successful potentially reflect the tensions and challenges of social entrepreneurship as hybrid organising from the organisational to the individual level (Battilana and Lee 2014). On the one hand, while positive impact is a core criterion for career success, positive impact may take a long time to manifest and

indeed negative impact can also emerge as a result of mission drift, financial challenges, or poorly thought out activities and low quality services (e.g., Haugh and Talwar 2016; Ramus and Vaccaro, 2017; Trivedi and Misra 2015), thus creating opportunities for social entrepreneurs to question the success of their careers. As suggested in the literature, social entrepreneurs aim to influence and achieve sustainable and systematic social change (Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern 2006; Thompson, Alvy, and Lees 2000), such as slowing down the climate crisis or reducing poverty, which requires ideological long-term visionary social ventures rather than short-term campaign actions (Sastre-Castillo, Peris-Ortiz, and Danvila-Del Valle 2015). In such circumstances, social entrepreneurs may not see their careers as successful and may rely on identifying smaller milestones to facilitate perceived career success throughout their journeys. This is also why they may rely on social relations with beneficiaries and their broader communities to receive positive feedback and acknowledgement of their work. On the other hand, social entrepreneurs' drive for positive impact as a fundamental component of career success may be questioned by personally relevant others, such as family members, due to the lack of financial security, thus hindering perceptions of career success. Future research can further investigate how social entrepreneurs gain acceptance and legitimacy not only for their social ventures, but also for their career choice amongst personally significant others.

Third, our findings also show tensions between personal and organisational needs and evaluation criteria that raise questions about the sustainability of human capital in the social entrepreneurship ecosystem and the inclusiveness of social entrepreneurship as a career, at least in Malaysia. Our findings demonstrate that social entrepreneurs may deprioritise their personal needs in relation to financial security (in line with Dempsey and Sanders 2010; Erro-Garcés 2019; Urbano, Toledano, and Soriano 2010), work-nonwork boundaries, time for recovery, coping with

emotional exhaustion, and prioritising organisational needs, such as financial sustainability of the social venture. Such sacrifices and stressors may hinder the wellbeing of social entrepreneurs in the long term with potential implications not only for their social ventures in terms of performance (Stephan 2018), but also potentially leading to individuals burning out and leaving the entire social entrepreneurship ecosystem. These personal sacrifices also expose taken-for-granted privileges and resources that may not be available to everyone, such as personal financial security through other means or limited personal responsibilities. The taken-for-granted availability of such resources and the expectation to prioritise the organisation over personal needs also highlights that social entrepreneurship may not be an inclusive career option for all. Indeed, individuals with fewer personal resources, with more caring responsibilities, or with particular health challenges (e.g., chronic fatigue) may find it difficult to evaluate their social entrepreneurship work as successful from a career perspective. Future research is required to better understand the factors that contribute to social entrepreneurs' wellbeing and how social entrepreneurship can become more inclusive.

Finally, our findings emerged from a novel research context (i.e., social entrepreneurs) highlighting how traditional dimensions of career success can be interpreted in novel ways by individuals with less traditional careers and work. Social entrepreneurship presents an alternative to traditional careers (Dempsey and Sanders 2010) because it is perceived as a purposeful existential life work (Cohen and Katz 2016). It is a career choice driven by a search for meaning (Malach-Pines and Yafe-Yanai 2001), thus strengthening commitment and perseverance. In this novel research context, our findings highlight how established career success dimensions, such as those identified by the Career Success Framework (Mayrhofer et al. 2016), can carry new and distinct meanings stemming from the unique context of the career. The study's findings show that

social entrepreneurs perceive and evaluate career success dimensions differently (refer to Table 2 for details) and often challenge taken-for-granted assumptions of success. For example, while the Career Success Framework highlights financial security as the key indicator of success in most careers, social entrepreneurs sacrifice their personal financial security in the short term for the financial sustainability of the social ventures in the long term. While the CSF highlights the importance of positive feedback from supervisors and co-workers, social entrepreneurs seek acceptance and positive feedback from family members, beneficiaries, and other social entrepreneurs because their work context is structurally different. While the CSF focuses on individual-level subjective experiences of career, our findings suggest that for some individuals, such as social entrepreneurs, organisational-level indicators are also important because of the close connection between the social entrepreneur's identity and their ventures (e.g., O'Neil et al. 2020). Thus, the study's findings suggest that future research on careers will benefit from investigating the experiences of individuals with non-traditional work and careers, which is becoming increasingly common (Barley, Bechky, and Milliken 2017), as well as how careers can be seen as more emergent phenomena instead of planned linear experiences.

Limitations

While this study offers in-depth insights of the lived experiences of social entrepreneurs in experiencing career success, there are a number of limitations. As a qualitative study, the findings cannot be generalised to broader contexts (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). The findings are representative of the experiences and perceptions of 18 MSEs but are not generalisable to the larger population of social entrepreneurs. While the participants in this study share characteristics with those who engage in social entrepreneurship in Malaysia (Bosma et al. 2016), the experiences of these participants may not reflect the experiences of social entrepreneurs who are less privileged

or have health challenges. The social entrepreneurial experiences and articulation of career success amongst such individuals may therefore be different. Hence, further research within the Malaysian context to explore social entrepreneurship amongst more marginalised and less privileged groups is required as well as research with social entrepreneurs outside of Malaysia.

Conclusion

This study contributes to both social entrepreneurship and contemporary careers research by explicating social entrepreneurs' perceptions and evaluations of career success. In doing so, the research introduces a new theoretical perspective for investigating the lived experiences, decisions, and practices of social entrepreneurs while also introducing social entrepreneurs as a novel context for research in careers.

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Table 1: Profile of Participants

Participant pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education	Social venture age	Social issue	Type of activities
Kamal	Male	40s	Undergraduate	2	Civic Engagement	Training; Networking
Imran	Male	30s	Postgraduate	2	Civic Engagement	Training; Networking
Sue	Female	30s	Postgraduate	2	Civic Engagement	Training; Networking
Alya	Female	20s	Undergraduate	3	Civic Engagement; Law & rights	Employing
Min	Female	20s	Postgraduate	3	Civic Engagement; Law & rights	Employing
Chen	Female	20s	Postgraduate	3	Civic Engagement; Law & rights	Employing
Ali	Male	20s	Undergraduate	4	Environment; Food	Supplying
Mohan	Male	30s	Undergraduate	8	Environment	Organising; Educating; Supplying
Fiona	Female	30s	Undergraduate	8	Environment	Organising; Educating; Supplying
Lian	Female	30s	Undergraduate	4	Culture; Economic	Training; Supplying
Yuan	Female	20s	Undergraduate	4	Food; Family	Training; Supplying
Hue	Female	20s	Undergraduate	4	Food; Family	Training; Supplying
Adam	Male	20s	Undergraduate	4	Food	Organising
Yee	Female	20s	Undergraduate	5	Education	Educating
Faruz	Male	20s	Undergraduate	3	Civic engagement	Training
Kiong	Male	30s	Undergraduate	1	Economic	Training; Supplying
Fatimah	Female	40s	Undergraduate	5	Culture; Economic	Supplying
Parveen	Female	40s	Undergraduate	8	Civic engagement	Counselling; Employing

Table 2: Comparison of career success dimensions in 5C Project and amongst social entrepreneurship

Career Success Dimensions	Career Success Framework by 5C Project (Mayrhofer et al. 2016)	Social Entrepreneurs
Social relations	**Positive impact** – careers have meaning and purpose; being able to serve the community through work, and engage with work that is personally and socially valued. **Positive relationships** – appreciation of and positive feedback on work by others; fame; people want to be visible and to be noticed for their work **Work-life balance (WLB)** – balance between work and nonwork life with clear boundaries: there is a coherent whole	**Everything is about positive impact** – The drive to create positive social impact is the foundation of the social entrepreneurship career; try everything possible to solve the social issue as a social entrepreneur, do not consider alternate career options when encountered problems. **Positive relationships, where my work and I are accepted with encouragement** – acceptance, appreciation and positive feedback by others serve as important career success signpost **Work-life integration is experienced** – work-life integration as an indicator of career success; mindful about the risk of social enterprise intruding into the nonwork spheres
Pursuing one's own projects	**Entrepreneurship** - founding one's own enterprise and being able to pursue one's own 'projects' within work; being able to create something innovative and extraordinary	**It started as a social project** – staring as a project to create social impact and transforming the project into a serious career **I founded it, I am responsible** – It is not just about creating the social venture, it comes with the responsibility to sustain it in safeguarding the beneficiaries.
Learning	**People are born to grow** – formally (via training or education) or informally (via on-the-job or life experiences)	**Social entrepreneurship-related training and learning –** It's ok not to possess social entrepreneurship skills to begin with; training related to social entrepreneurship to gain the specialist knowledge in social entrepreneurship and facilitate network building

		Learning from mentors – a learning opportunity; mentorship externally and internationally is widely cherished
Material concerns	**Financial security –** work enables basic necessities for living and allows one to financially provide for his or her family (survival) **Financial achievement –** offers comfort, affluence and status: a visible signal of success, reflected in the forms of incentives received, rate of progression, promotion, and higher social status	**Financial security is a long-term goal** – social entrepreneurs sacrifice personal financial gain in the short term for organisational sustainability; mindful about individual financial security in the long term **Financial achievement - it's not for me but for the social enterprise –** Not for individual's wealth accumulation but essential for addressing the social issue sustainably

Figure 1: Data Structure

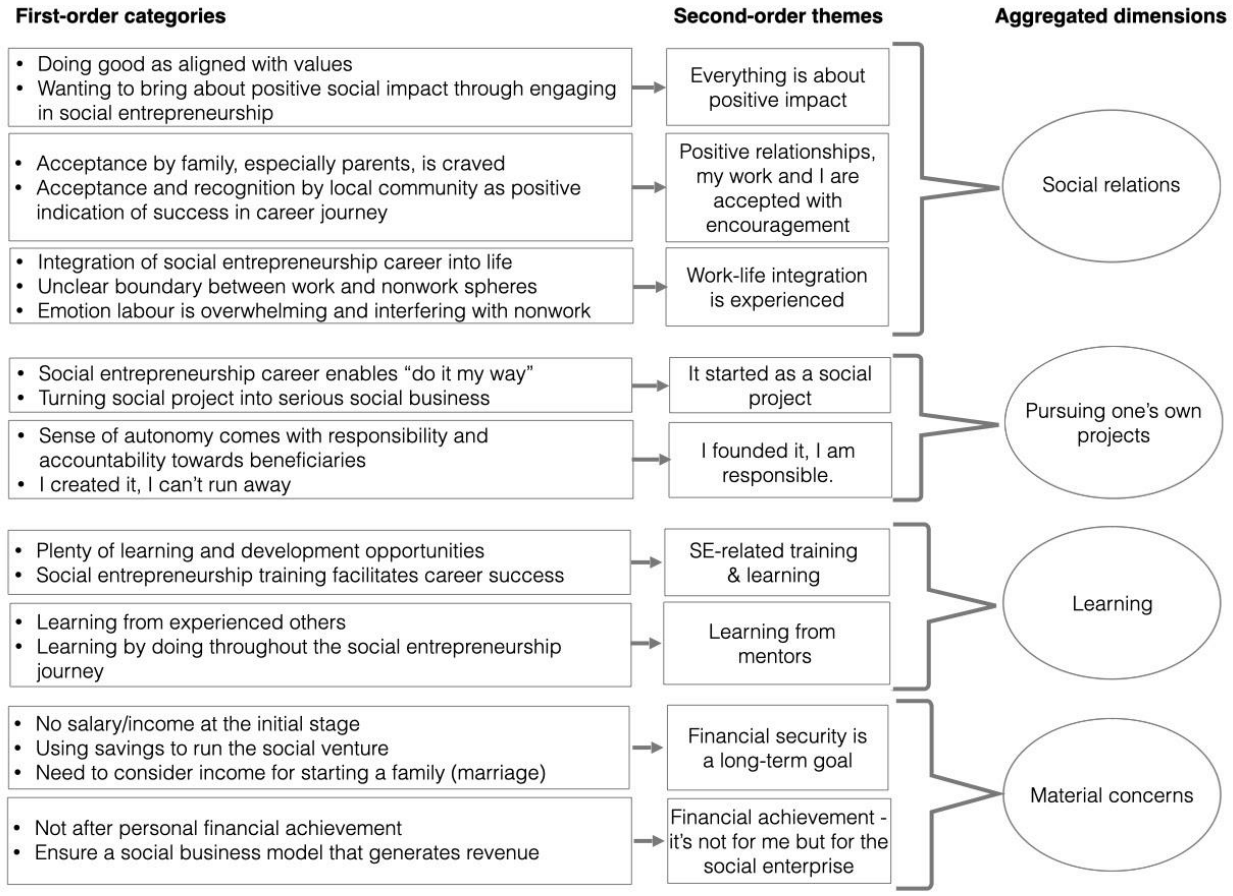

Figure 2: Career Success Framework amongst Social Entrepreneurs