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HOW INTENTIONS TO CREATE A SOCIAL VENTURE ARE FORMED
A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This exploratory study on one social entrepreneur challenges existing knowledge on the intention formation process of entrepreneurship. Drawing from social and cognitive psychology, we adapt an intention-based model from entrepreneurship and translate it to social entrepreneurship. Building on our findings, we argue that social entrepreneurs – like traditional entrepreneurs – experience perceptions of feasibility and desirability, and a propensity to act. However, complementing research on traditional entrepreneurs, we suggest that, in a preceding stage, social entrepreneurs develop social sentiments. Furthermore, we identify willpower, support, and the construction of opportunity as important antecedents of perceptions of feasibility and desirability, and propensity to act.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, intention, cognition

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Introduction

Social entrepreneurs play an essential role in societal development. In contrast to traditional “business” entrepreneurs, they focus primarily on social value creation – understood in this paper as the alleviation of a social problem such as poverty, hunger, illiteracy, any type of human rights violation, environmental destruction, among others, and/or the stimulation of social transformation – and can be found in several contexts. Social entrepreneurs act within not-for-profit initiatives, searching for alternative funding strategies and management schemes to create social value (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skiller, 2003; Boschee, 1998); within for-profit contexts, attempting to enhance the socially responsible practice of commercial businesses engaged in cross-sector partnerships (Waddock, 1988; Wilkinson, 1992; Sagawa and Segal, 2000); and finally, as independent social entrepreneurs, creating social ventures to alleviate social problems and catalyze social transformation (Alvord, Brown et al., 2004).

Despite the relevance of social entrepreneurs’ actions for society and development, entrepreneurship as a scholarly field has – until recently – mainly examined the personality, activities and outcomes of traditional entrepreneurs, i.e., entrepreneurs whose primary objective is economic value creation. We argue that although the profit motive is a “central engine” for entrepreneurship, it does not preclude other motivations. Already in 1990, Gartner highlighted that entrepreneurship also occurs in the nonprofit sector¹. Moreover, as Venkataraman pointed out, there is no such thing as “non-social” entrepreneurship: all entrepreneurs create social value by providing jobs, paying taxes and creating new markets and technologies (Venkataraman, 1997). While for traditional entrepreneurs social value creation remains a secondary outcome or byproduct, it is the very *raison d’être* of social entrepreneurs. Given the focus of most previous research, our scholarly understanding of social entrepreneurs is scarce. The few existing research efforts have focused mostly on “who social entrepreneurs are”, i.e., on identifying and describing their personality. According to these studies, social entrepreneurs are characterized by very special traits (Drayton, 2002), special leadership skills (Henton, Melville, & Walesh, 1997; Thompson et al., 2000), the passionate way they fight to realize their vision (Bornstein, 1998; Boschee, 1995), their strong ethical fiber (Bornstein, 1998), and/or their entrepreneurial qualities (Drayton, 2002).

The world of ideas, innovation, and opportunity has traditionally been associated with economic value creation, a link that has attracted the attention of management scholars. Although today it is increasingly recognized that ideas, innovation, and opportunity are not the exclusive domain of traditional entrepreneurs, we lack conceptual and empirical

¹ We do recognize that some of the initiatives of social entrepreneurs might be for-profit ones.

research to ascertain whether social entrepreneurship is a subset of – or, better, provides a different context in which to study – traditional entrepreneurship, or whether it is an independent field of study.

The rise of social entrepreneurship, both as a practice and as a theoretical endeavor, provides a unique opportunity for the field of entrepreneurship to challenge, question, and rethink important concepts and assumptions in its effort towards a unifying paradigm. The main motivation for this exploratory study, therefore, lies in challenging, corroborating and extending existing knowledge on an entrepreneurial phenomenon – the intention formation process – by examining it in the context of social entrepreneurship. Drawing from social and cognitive psychology and research on the intention formation process of traditional entrepreneurs, we examine how the intention to create a social venture develops in a particular social entrepreneur: María Elena Ordóñez, who in 1996 created Arcandina, a venture producing educational TV shows and multi-media products designed to motivate children to embrace citizenship and environmental values. Building on our findings, we propose that – similar to traditional entrepreneurs – social entrepreneurs develop the intention to start a social venture after experiencing perceptions of feasibility and desirability, and a propensity to act. However, complementing research on traditional entrepreneurs, our findings suggest that, in a preceding stage, social entrepreneurs develop social sentiments, i.e., a strong devotion to other people or ideals. Furthermore, we identify willpower, support, and the recognition/construction of an opportunity as important antecedents of perceptions of feasibility and desirability, and propensity to act.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we review the existing literature on entrepreneurial intention formation. Second, we describe the approach of this study and discuss the methods used. We then present the results, an overview of the model, and the propositions. In a next step, we offer an illustration of this model. We conclude by summarizing the implications of this study for the literature and discussing its limitations, as well as ideas for future research.

Entrepreneurial Intention Formation

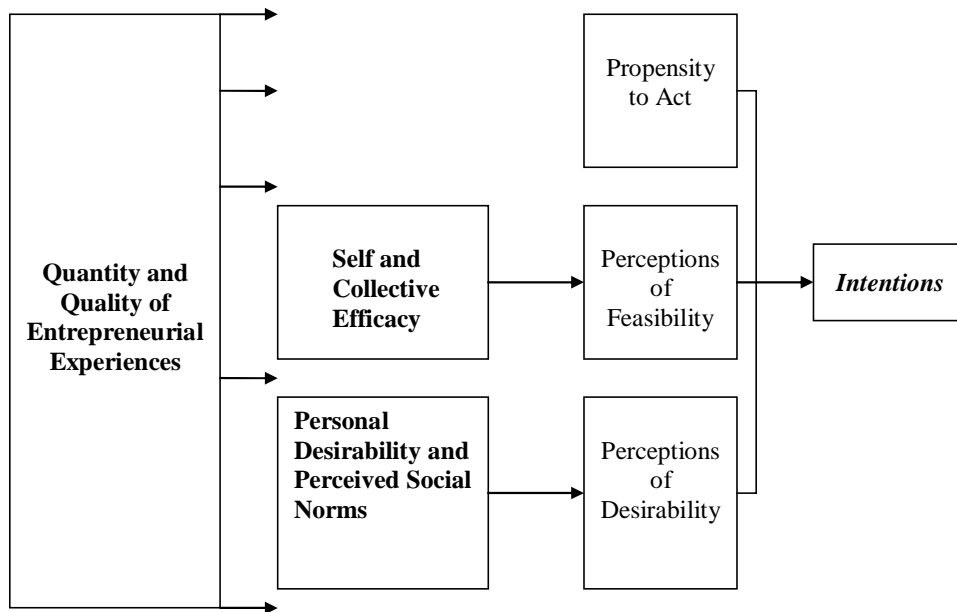
With his Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) the psychologist Ajzen claimed that intentions explain human behavior in specific contexts with a high degree of accuracy (Ajzen, 1991). After an extensive review of prior research, Kim and Hunter (1993) found, through meta-analysis, that behavioral intentions are a reliable moderator of the attitude-behavior relationship. TPB has been successfully tested in several contexts (see Van Ryn, Lytle et al., 1996; Hrubes, Ajzen et al., 2001). Ajzen (2001) claimed that a sufficient number of investigations have demonstrated the validity of the theory.

In the entrepreneurship context, intentions – defined as the “degree of commitment toward some future target behavior” (Krueger, 1993: 6) – have also been identified as an important property of emerging organizations (Katz and Gartner, 1988; Katz, 1993) and a reliable predictor of new venture creation (Krueger, 1993). Without them, the creation of a new venture is highly improbable (Krueger, 2000a).

Shapero and Sokol’s (1982) work has been particularly influential in exploring antecedents of entrepreneurial intentions. These authors proposed that perceptions (i.e. perceived venture feasibility and desirability), in combination with a propensity to act, influence behavior through intentions (Shapero and Sokol, 1982). A number of entrepreneurship scholars (Scott and Twomey, 1988; Learned, 1992; Krueger, 1993) have examined entrepreneurial intention formation by building on Shapero and Sokol’s model.

Norris Krueger, for example, has pushed this stream of research forward by presenting a refined version of the original model (Krueger, 1993; Krueger and Brazeal, 1994; Krueger, 2000a; Krueger, Reilly et al., 2000b). See Figure 1 for an illustration. Comparing the TPB with the Shapero-Krueger model, Krueger et al. found strong support for the latter and illustrated the model's superior ability to predict entrepreneurial intentions (Krueger, Reilly et al., 2000b).

Figure 1. Model of Entrepreneurial Intentions adapted from Krueger and Brazeal (1994)



In his attempt to disentangle the antecedents of perceptions of desirability and feasibility, Krueger claimed that perceptions – defined as insight or intuition, or capacity for insight or intuition – that lead to entrepreneurial behavior are derived partly from the entrepreneur's prior entrepreneurial experiences (Krueger 1993). Prior entrepreneurial experiences refer to the quantity and quality of prior exposure to entrepreneurship. Quantity of exposure refers to personal experience in a family business, family involvement in a business, and/or participation in a start-up, whereas quality of exposure is the perception of whether those experiences were positive or negative. Prior entrepreneurial experiences influence perceptions of feasibility and desirability, and propensity to act, which in turn influence intentions to behave entrepreneurially, i.e., to create an entrepreneurial venture.

Perception of desirability. **Perception of desirability** is the personal bias towards ventures perceived as more desirable, a bias that grows from the perceived personal consequence of the entrepreneurial outcomes (e.g. good vs. bad), type of venture (e.g. high tech vs. low tech) (Krueger and Brazeal, 1994), and the level of support in the environment (e.g. family, peers, colleagues, mentors, others) (Shapero and Sokol, 1982; Scott and Twomey, 1988). Research has shown that perceptions of desirability are positively related to entrepreneurial intentions (Krueger 1993).

Perception of feasibility. **Perception of feasibility** is the entrepreneur's belief in his/her ability to put together the required human, social and financial resources for the new venture (Shapero and Sokol, 1982). That belief does not come from prior experience as such, but from the resulting expertise (Reuber, Dyke et al., 1990), which helps entrepreneurs to

overcome potential pitfalls, such as misreading the market or forming unrealistic expectations (MacMillan, Block et al., 1986). Expertise developed from prior experience is manifested in the entrepreneur's perceived self-efficacy (i.e. the belief in one's abilities to plan and execute the path required to produce certain outcomes) and social capital (i.e. the social network which, resting on trust and cooperation, is capable of providing the resources to implement a new venture, such as business incubators, targeted small business programs, business professionals, and established institutions and agencies) (Starr and Fondas, 1992). Research has shown that perceptions of feasibility are positively related to entrepreneurial intentions (Krueger 1993).

Propensity to act. **Propensity to act** is the innate tendency to act, and is felt with varied intensity among different people. For this reason, it influences intentions not only directly, but also indirectly (Krueger, 1993). When propensity to act is low, entrepreneurial intentions are unlikely to develop, and perceptions of desirability become the sole predictors of intentions (Krueger 1993). On the other hand, when propensity to act is high, the quantity of prior entrepreneurial experience, in addition to perceptions of desirability and feasibility, directly influences intentions (Krueger 1993).

The Approach of this Study

This study is based on empirical investigation of the entrepreneurial intention formation process of a "social entrepreneur" – an individual who combines resources in innovative ways to pursue opportunities aiming at the creation of organizations and/or practices that generate social value. The specific research question of our work is, "How do social entrepreneurs develop the intention to create and pursue a social venture?" Building on traditional entrepreneurship studies on intention formation (Krueger, 1993; Krueger and Reilly, 2000b), we expect that social entrepreneurs, like traditional entrepreneurs, experience perceptions of feasibility and desirability, and propensity to act, which influence the intention to create social ventures. However, since social entrepreneurs operate in a different context, we embrace the possibility that the antecedents to the three mentioned variables might differ from the ones found in the traditional entrepreneurship literature.

Since scholarly research on social entrepreneurs is virtually non-existent, we chose an inductive, qualitative approach to understand how they develop the intention to create and pursue a social venture. Accordingly, we do not attempt to test existing theory on entrepreneurial intentions. Rather, we attempt to broaden existing theory by applying it in a different, and promising, context.

Methods

The Research Domain

The unit of analysis for this research is the social entrepreneur. María Elena Ordóñez, the social entrepreneur examined in this study, was carefully selected to meet the criteria for this research. First, since this investigation is based on recall of past events by a single individual, it was crucial to select a recent initiative to diminish retrospective bias (Miller, Cardinal et al., 1997). One of the authors conducted a search of 28 Ecuadorian social entrepreneurs, and selected one whose initiative was less than 10 years old. Second, we selected an Ashoka Fellow to increase the probability of selecting an individual who met our definition of a social entrepreneur. Ashoka is a U.S.-based non-profit organization that

supports social entrepreneurs all over the world by giving them a monthly stipend that allows them to devote themselves full-time to their initiatives. After interviewing thousands of social entrepreneurs, Ashoka has developed a rigorous set of criteria to evaluate them. These criteria measure four things: creativity, entrepreneurial quality, social impact of the idea, and ethical fiber (Drayton, 2002; Bornstein, 2004).

María Elena Ordóñez: Arcandina Foundation

María Elena Ordóñez became aware of two seemingly unrelated problems, and developed the means to address them in parallel. She observed that Ecuadorian children lacked high-quality educational television programs, and noticed that despite severe environmental problems in her country, the public at large did not feel accountable. In response, she developed Arcandina, an innovative initiative that entertains and educates children (audience) through high quality TV programs and other communication channels (distribution channels) about the need to protect our environment (content).

Arcandina – short for Arca Andina (Andean Ark) – first aired in Ecuador in December of 1996, as the first Ecuadorian television show promoting environmental awareness and conservation. The show immerses children in a fantasy world in which muppets – representing endangered species of the Andean region of South America – embark in a boat, the “Andean Ark”, on a weekly mission to protect their habitat. The Ark – capturing the essence of the familiar biblical story of Noah’s Ark – is the means to save the animals of the Andean region from destruction. The protagonist muppets are the jaguar (Jagui), the sea lion (Cory, named after Coral), and the toucan (Tucan)². A fourth muppet, the Green Guardian – a monster-like computer expert who keeps important files that contains mother nature’s secrets – joined Arcandina’s heroes in their journey to protect our environment and species from destruction, garbage, and pollution. They all live in the Ark, where they receive information about environmental destruction and organize and carry out rescue missions. Finally, to make the show more entertaining, the muppets fight villains who attempt to destroy the environment. The villains’ leader is Avaricious Maximus, a greedy monster that loves to accumulate money and feeds on environmental destruction. He partners with his right-hand man, Ratasura – a rat that loves garbage – and other ruffian followers to antagonize the muppets. Ratasura became the children’s favorite character and Arcandina’s most innovative feature, as – despite being a shameless rat who admits loving garbage – he does all the naughty things that make children laugh (including environmentally destructive behavior), while gradually improving his manners under the influence of the thoughtful and convincing arguments of Arcandina’s heroes.

Data Sources

As suggested by Eisenhardt (1989) and Miller, Cardinal et al. (1997), this research combined several data sources: interviews, archival data, and observations. Initially, one of the researchers contacted the Ecuadorian Ashoka representative, who early in 2003 asked María Elena Ordóñez to participate in the study. The interview with Ordóñez was conducted in Quito, Ecuador, in July 2003. To validate her responses, three co-workers were interviewed on the same day, and written documents were collected. Additional validation interviews showing preliminary results (Miles and Huberman, 1994), including a second interview with Ordóñez and with her parents, were conducted in Ecuador in May 2004. Independently, the second

² The three muppets were carefully selected to meet several criteria: they (1) must be endangered species, (2) must live in Latin American countries, and (3) must be visually appealing as muppets. The sea lion –although not considered an endangered species– was included to represent the Galapagos islands, and for its appeal to children.

researcher interviewed María Elena Ordóñez in a different setting, namely Switzerland, in September 2003.

Data Collection

The interviews were conducted in Spanish. Both researchers independently translated them into English to eliminate translation biases. Three different kinds of interviews were conducted. (1) The social entrepreneur was interviewed following a pre-established format of open-ended questions obtained from the literature review. To reduce retrospective bias, during the interview the researcher asked questions and let the social entrepreneur respond freely without interruptions, and without forcing or redirecting her answers (Miller, Cardinal et al., 1997). Only once a topic was judged to have been sufficiently covered did the researcher move on to another question. No handwritten notes were taken, to ensure maximum concentration on each response, and to be sure to fully understand each one. The interviews were recorded and listened to again at a different site on the same day to take notes and add further observations. This process allowed the researchers to consolidate the information immediately, and begin the analysis (Yin, 1989). (2) On the same day, co-workers were interviewed. These co-workers had been involved with the social entrepreneur for several years. (3) Ordóñez's parents were also interviewed, mainly to corroborate responses relating to the social entrepreneur's background. These interviews were not recorded, but hand-written notes were taken. (4) Finally, in a second round of interviews, the researchers presented the first analysis to Ordóñez, who corroborated the variables in the model. Furthermore, as mentioned before, in this second round of interviews the second researcher corroborated the model by interviewing Ordóñez in a very different setting (different country).

Data Analysis

Eisenhardt (1989) claimed that the qualitative approach is useful when a phenomenon is not sufficiently well known, and when the goal is to build – rather than test – theory. Therefore, this study adopted a qualitative approach, first, because the intention formation process of social entrepreneurs has not been empirically studied, and second, because traditional entrepreneurial intention models have not yet been applied in the context of social value creation.

As suggested by Eisenhardt (1989), after the interview, one of the researchers prepared two types of written documents. The first document was a case description to become sufficiently knowledgeable about the social entrepreneur and her initiative. The second document was a detailed analysis of her responses that included all the variables in the model.

To systematically analyze the interview, the researchers derived a priori categories from the literature review (Eisenhardt, 1989). These categories were the entrepreneur's characteristics, background, context, prior knowledge, social networks, intentions, perceptions, trigger events, outcomes, opportunity, support, capacity building, and legitimacy. After the interview with Ordóñez had been transcribed, the researchers began the analysis. In the search for meaning, careful attention was paid to words, phrases, sentences, and entire paragraphs. In the first round of analysis – as the starting point – the researchers assigned specific labels to each part of the interview. They then followed an iterative process to test each label's degree of fit with the data (Eisenhardt, 1989). Once they felt that all the labels fitted the data, the researchers started to include them in the categories found in the literature review, also in an iterative process. When a label did not fit an existing category, a new category was created and included in the model (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Results

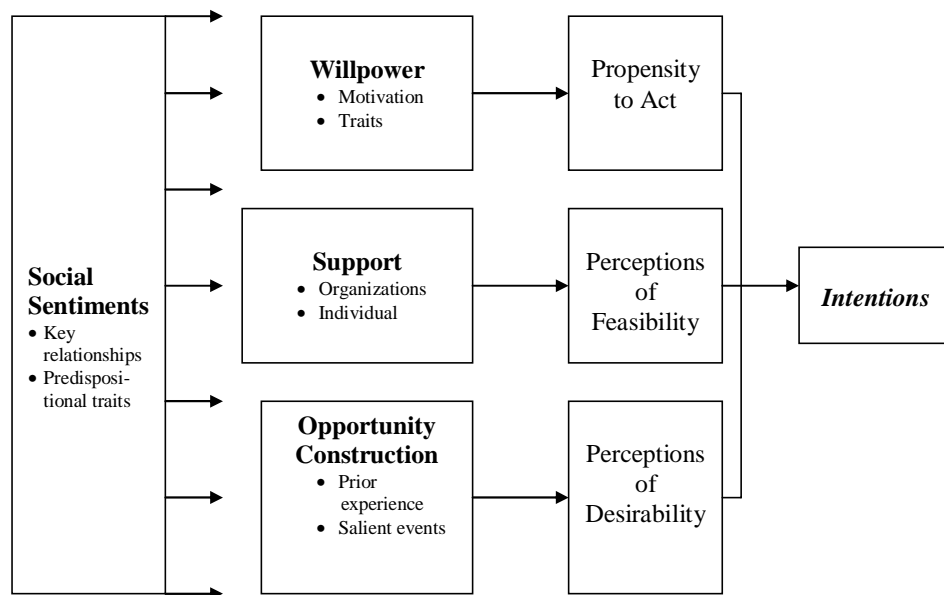
The following description of the results includes description and excerpts from the interviews with the social entrepreneur as support for the categories included in our model of entrepreneurial intention formation.

An Overview of the Model

As illustrated in Figure 2, the process of how Ordóñez developed the intention to create a social venture evolved in two chronologically distinct stages, each lasting a few years. In the first stage, Ordóñez formed social sentiments that provided the necessary base for subsequently developing intentions to create a social venture. In the second stage, her willpower, the support she gathered, and the way she constructed an opportunity allowed her to develop perceptions of desirability and feasibility, as well as to strengthen her propensity to create Arcandina (the social venture).

In the following section we present the model of how social entrepreneurs form the intention to create a social venture, and derive propositions. After that, we illustrate this model in more detail, using the case of María Elena Ordóñez.

Figure 2. Model of Social Entrepreneurial Intentions



Stage 1: The Formation of Social Sentiments

Ajzen's TPB asserts that beliefs influence attitudes, which in turn influence intentions to act (Ajzen, 1991). Previous studies in entrepreneurship found that prior exposure to entrepreneurship (which forms beliefs) influences entrepreneurial perceptions of desirability and feasibility (which form attitudes) (Krueger, 1993). The data in this research corroborate that the intention formation process of social entrepreneurs also begins with the formation of beliefs. However, those beliefs, instead of merely originating from prior entrepreneurial experiences (quantity and quality), develop from what is known in the field of psychology as sentiments, which in this context are sentiments (or passion) towards social issues.

Sentiments – including perceptions, motives and emotions, thinking and learning – are the complex combination of opinions and feelings that lead to action and judgement, and focus the individual on the pursuit of relatively permanent ends (Asch, 1957). They accidentally develop from a strong relationship with someone or something, and are biased by the individual's prior experiences. Once developed, their strength is manifested in the strong devotion individuals develop towards, for example, other people or ideals (Asch, 1957). In summary, sentiments control individuals' behavior, energize them towards what has become the center of their attention (e.g. a particular social issue), and guide their long-term individual actions.

In the social entrepreneurship context, social sentiments seem to turn individuals into citizens who are dissatisfied with the status quo, loyal to their values and philosophy, and motivated to act in a socially responsible manner (Prabhu, 1999). They also make them value other social entrepreneurs' lifestyles, respect, and success (Prabhu, 1999). Consequently, responses such as "I was raised in a spirit of charity and giving", "I grew sensitive to other people's feelings", and "I felt uneasy about the problems of the poor" are typical of social entrepreneurs (Bonbright, 1997).

In María Elena Ordóñez's case, the researchers found that social sentiments are formed from the complex combination of a key relationship (her relationship with nature), and predispositional traits (her capacity to experience and instill empathy and her high degree of moral judgment). Predispositional traits are those that naturally motivate the individual to take into consideration other people's needs or interests.

Key relationships and predispositional traits are, respectively, external and internal factors which influence the individual's behavior. If only external factors influenced behavior, then it would be reasonable to assume that all siblings raised in the same family environment, subject to the same external factors, would develop the same tendencies towards social issues. Since practical experience suggests that this is not the case, it is clear that individual characteristics (traits) determine why some are predisposed towards social issues while others are not. Our findings indicate that individuals who are influenced by a key relationship with someone or something, and who are naturally sensitive to social issues (the necessary predispositional traits), are most likely to develop social sentiments.

Finally, the formation of social sentiments does not automatically imply the creation of a social venture. Individuals with strong social sentiments may act in various sectors and in a wide variety of professions (e.g. doctors) and vocations (e.g. religious or educational). However, social sentiments seem to be an important element in the process of formation of intentions to create a social venture.

P 1: The decision to create a social venture is influenced by the early formation of social sentiments.

P 2: Social sentiments originate from a key relationship with someone or something (external factor), and predispositional traits (internal factor).

Stage 2: The Entrepreneurial Process

As mentioned, according to the TBP, attitudes stemming from beliefs influence behavioral intentions. Entrepreneurship research has corroborated the validity of the TBP and revealed three attitudes that influence entrepreneurial intentions: perceived feasibility, perceived desirability, and propensity to act (Krueger and Reilly, 2000b). The Shapero-Krueger model (Krueger and Reilly, 2000b) illustrates that perceived desirability is influenced by

expected outcomes of starting a business, and that perceived feasibility is influenced by perceived self-efficacy, i.e., the feeling of being capable of creating a venture. In addition, propensity to act is the tendency that motivates an individual who desires to start a business or create a venture, and feels capable of succeeding, to act. It explains the commitment many individuals have towards their own decisions, which motivates them to act to achieve their goals. The data in this exploratory research supported these general mechanisms in the context of social entrepreneurship. However, a more fine-grained analysis revealed that the various attitudes result from antecedents that may reflect the peculiarities of intention formation in the context of social entrepreneurship. In short, Ordóñez's propensity to act was influenced by her willpower; the perceived feasibility of creating Arcandina was influenced by various dimensions of support; and the perceived desirability of creating a social venture was influenced by the construction of an opportunity (Arcandina).

Willpower. The data revealed that willpower, defined as energetic determination and, according to Ghoshal and Bruch, “the most powerful force of human behavior” (2003: 51), is closely related to propensity to act. Willpower can be identified in an individual when he/she manifests an absolute commitment to achieving his/her goals. Ghoshal and Bruch (2003: 51) described it as “a deep personal attachment to an intention”. Its power is such that it moves an individual to act, despite adversity, lack of motivation, low energy levels, or alternative opportunities. Furthermore, willpower seems to inspire the individual in the face of difficulties (Ghoshal and Bruch, 2003).

In the case of María Elena Ordóñez, we found that willpower resulted from the complex combination of motivations (create social impact, reach more people, financial, and desire for social change) with action-related traits (her tendency to do things her way, adaptation skills, and long-term focus).

It is important to note that willpower and motivations are distinct, but related, concepts. Willpower is much more than motivation (Ghoshal and Bruch, 2003). An individual may feel unmotivated, yet still be capable of finishing complex tasks through an exercise of will. However, this research does not refer to the degree of motivation (i.e., weak versus strong). Rather, it focuses on the type of motivation, which is not only related, but triggers willpower. According to the literature, the type of motivation that social entrepreneurs experience is context-specific. First, social entrepreneurs are motivated by a strong desire to change society, a discomfort with the status quo, altruistic feelings, and a need to be socially responsible (Bornstein, 1998; Prabhu, 1999). Drayton (2002) argues that this “entrepreneurial quality” distinguishes the average from the successful social entrepreneur. Second, unlike traditional entrepreneurs, who are motivated by economic value creation, social entrepreneurs are motivated primarily by social value creation (Hibbert, Hogg et al., 2002), which in this paper is understood as addressing a social problem or bringing about social change.

In addition, María Elena Ordóñez displayed particular action-oriented traits that made her feel capable of accomplishing the undertaking. Research on social entrepreneurs reflects that they possess skills already attributed to traditional entrepreneurs (McLeod, 1997; Boschee, 1998; Prabhu, 1999; Morse and Dudley, 2002), which increase their level of willpower.

Motivation and action-oriented traits are both stable characteristics in an individual, i.e., both develop over a long period of time and do not change in the short term. If an individual is motivated to create social value but lacks action-oriented traits, he/she may feel incapable of implementing his/her initiative. Conversely, if an individual feels capable of starting a new venture but lacks the motivation to create (above all) social value, he/she will not display the willpower to become a social entrepreneur. Therefore, both motivation and action-oriented traits are necessary to develop willpower.

Finally, while an individual who acts with willpower will not necessarily create a social venture, we argue that willpower is an important variable in understanding the process by which the intention to create a social venture develops.

P 3: A social entrepreneur's propensity to act is influenced by the display of willpower.

P 4: Willpower is determined by the combination of the type of motivations that social entrepreneurs experience and action-oriented traits that make them feel capable of pursuing their initiatives.

Support. Our data showed that the support – defined as access to human and material resources – that social entrepreneurs are able to gather affects their perception of feasibility. In consequence, social entrepreneurs will perceive their initiative to be feasible only after they have evaluated the amount and type of support available for their venture.

In the case of María Elena Ordóñez, we found that support must occur at two distinct levels (individual and organizational) if it is to have a positive influence on the social entrepreneur's perceptions of the feasibility of the venture.

Undoubtedly, social, human, and material support is important in entrepreneurship. Comparing traditional to social entrepreneurship, Austin, Stevenson et al. (2004: 9) claimed that social entrepreneurs “rely just as much, if not more so, on a rich network of contacts that will provide them with access to funding, board members, and management and staff, among other resources”. Social entrepreneurs may face more restrictions in their search for funding, and uses of funds, than traditional entrepreneurs do, which will make them more dependent on support in order to succeed (Austin, Stevenson et al., 2004). First, unlike in the commercial sector, where a business plan that offers credible prospects of a good return is very likely to secure access to all kinds of resources, in the social sector, due to the difficulty of measuring the social return on investments, the competition for resources is far more intense. Second, because of the diversity of initiatives, the market for resources for initiatives in the nonprofit sector is more highly fragmented. Third, since not all social entrepreneurial initiatives generate their own income, at least not in the early stages, social entrepreneurs need to manage, deal with, and convince a wider variety of stakeholders with very different backgrounds (e.g., volunteers, managers, business people, board members, other nonprofit organizations, donors, and government, among others).

The level of support that social entrepreneurs obtain from stakeholders will depend on the stock of resources available in their social network, and on their ability to enhance that stock by influencing stakeholders' judgment of the venture and thus also their willingness to invest.

Again, we see access to human, social, and material resources as a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition to develop intentions to create a social venture.

P 5: The perceived feasibility of a social venture is influenced by the amount and type of support the social entrepreneur is able to gather at the individual and organizational level.

Opportunity Construction. Opportunities can be searched for or they can be discovered. Both types of opportunity recognition require prior experience or knowledge. One does not search for what one does not know, and one cannot discover what one's mind cannot perceive. Krueger (2000a) proposed a third way to recognize opportunities. He claimed that potential entrepreneurs do not discover or search for opportunities. Rather, they construct

them: “opportunities are thus very much in the eye of the beholder” (Krueger 2000a: 6). Once the individual perceives the opportunity, he/she will experience perceptions of desirability – among other factors – if the venture meets personal preferences (e.g., high versus low tech) (Krueger and Brazeal, 1994).

Applying this to social entrepreneurship, once an individual has developed social sentiments that predispose him/her to social issues, and has constructed (perceived) an opportunity for a social venture, he/she will perceive a desire to create it if the social nature of the venture meets personal preferences. In addition, the opportunity will be considered attractive if there is “sufficient potential for positive social impact to justify the investment of time, energy and money required to pursue it seriously” (Guclu, Dees et al., 2002: 1). Thus, the nature and attractiveness of the perceived opportunity affect the perceptions of desirability.

In the case of María Elena Ordóñez, we found that the opportunity was constructed by combining prior experience and salient events. Her initiative –Arcandina– initially consisted of a television program for children to educate them on environmental issues. In the process of constructing Arcandina, Ordóñez combined three different elements. She put together the potential of television as a medium to reach her audience, her love for children, and Ecuador’s environmental problems. Only after she had interiorized the fact that she wanted to devote herself to each one of these three elements – an event that occurred during her college years – was she ready to combine them and envision Arcandina. Finally, once Arcandina was constructed in her mind, she automatically felt the desire to create the venture, and took all the necessary steps to eventually (more than ten years later) launch her television program.

But there is an element of randomness in the way Ordóñez developed prior experience with children and television. She did not get involved with them in a premeditated way. Rather, she was exposed to salient events that inclined her to select a career that involved children, and to search for a position in a newly created television program for children during her college years. Thus, salient events were responsible for the type of prior experience she had, which turned out to be crucial for the construction of Arcandina. We will illustrate this point in more detail in the next section.

Finally, while important, opportunity construction is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the intention to create a social venture.

P 6: The perceived desirability of a social venture is influenced by the construction of a social opportunity.

P 7: The construction of a social opportunity is determined by a combination of the social entrepreneur’s prior experience and salient events that help him/her to recognize it.

Illustration of the Model

Stage 1: The Formation of Social Sentiments

Key Relationships: María Elena Ordóñez’s relationship with nature

“I have always shown an interest in nature, in my storybooks, in my writing. It’s something that has always inspired me, something I have enjoyed since I was little.”

Ordóñez claims that the main reason she got involved in social issues was her early “relationship” with nature, which started almost as soon as she was born and has been a central aspect of her life. The fact that she describes her involvement with nature as a “relationship” suggests that she interacts with it, that it plays an active role in her life, in contrast to experiencing a simple feeling of fondness. Nature, which is the essence of Arcandina, was discovered by Ordóñez very early in her life.

Soon after she was born, she was “lucky” in that her family moved to Salinas, a beautiful beach in Ecuador. She mentioned that, at the time she was there, Salinas had a very small population – probably fewer than 200 people – and a largely untouched environment. In her own words, it felt like a “paradise”; it was “peaceful and did not have many of the things you see today”. She protested against the tremendous growth that Salinas has undergone as a modern tourist resort, causing it to lose its ecological beauty. She enjoyed long walks on the beach and retains many happy memories of her early years in Salinas. When she reached school age, her family moved to the city –Guayaquil– but kept going to the beach regularly throughout her early life:

“I felt so deeply in touch with nature”.

The family’s move to a suburb in Guayaquil, called Los Ceibos (The Coral Trees) on account of the large number of coral trees found there, gave Ordóñez an opportunity to deepen her relationship with nature. Relatively sparsely populated at the time, the neighborhood consisted mainly of green fields and trees. She used to enjoy walking around the block, despite the jungle-like environment where one had to beware of animals such as snakes, or even ocelots. Her mother taught her to enjoy watching the mountain in front of her house, particularly in winter – the hot and rainy season in Guayaquil – when the forest grew more dense and turned a more intense green.

During her early school years she attended the Colegio Alemán Humboldt (German School). She felt “lucky” it was located in her neighborhood, and provided ample gardens and animals that she could enjoy. Overall, it was a place which allowed her to develop her relationship with nature.

Predispositional Traits: Empathy and Moral Judgment

Empathy. Empathy is one of Ordóñez’s most distinctive traits, one she has manifested regularly throughout her life. Through her involvement with nature, she has developed strong feelings of empathy towards the environment, which are reflected in the uneasiness she experiences at the sight of environmental destruction. As a clear manifestation of empathy at an early age, she recalls as a “dark period” the time when the forest on the hillside in front of her house in Los Ceibos was cleared and the land was built up:

“It was stupid, horrible, a traumatic shock in my life. When I saw the forest cut down, I nearly died.”

Ordóñez is equally sensitive to the damage that human beings cause to the animal kingdom, often driving species to extinction. Her sensitivity helped her to develop critical thinking skills that led her to recognize the problems of education, and the way human beings treat animals. She complains that most television shows limit themselves to educating us with facts about the animal kingdom while failing to show us the dangers that the animals face from our actions, treating them as if they were living in a completely separate world.

In line with Ordóñez's consideration for animals and approach to television education, Arcandina's message departs radically from mainstream television programming. Its main objective is to arouse empathy in children and encourage them towards environmentally friendly behaviors. The way Arcandina achieves this is by getting children emotionally involved with the muppet heroes, who are pictured as victims by:

“giving them (the animals) the voice of what they feel that we – as a separate species – are doing to them... they are the victims of things that occur frequently. In every show, I always tried to make it clear that these animals are seriously facing extinction, and that they are endangered because of the loss of their habitat due to destructive human actions. The solutions are practical things that each one of us can do to help wildlife to survive; it's not a job for Superman, nothing like that. My idea was, first, tell you what you can do to change, appeal to your feelings, make you say, 'I love my favorite puppet', and only then make you say 'I can do that'.”

Her own capacity to experience empathy helped her to understand its effect on others, and incorporate it as an innovative feature of Arcandina. Through the format of successive shows, in which Ratasura's behavior gradually changes, Ordóñez attempts to instill empathy in children, so as to promote a change of behavior in them too.

Moral Judgment. An advanced level of moral judgment signifies judging actions according to ethical principles that appeal to justice, the equality of human beings, and respect for our dignity as individuals (Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977).

During her years as a schoolteacher at the Colegio Alemán (1985-89), María Elena Ordóñez displayed a high level of moral judgement when she made the difficult decision to shift careers and become a social entrepreneur. Despite enjoying her job and being economically solvent, she disagreed fundamentally with the school's system of education, which tended to categorize children according to their learning capabilities, forcing her to take the dramatic decision to leave the school:

“Obviously, the school gave them a good basic education, but using a system in which, if you couldn't draw certain lines accurately, you were put under observation and suspected of having learning difficulties. The child was immediately categorized, and in my opinion that was wrong. I didn't feel good doing that.”

She strongly believed that the teachers should have collaborated more with the children and their families, instead of categorizing them and submitting critical reports to the administration. As a result, instead of adapting to the system, she felt driven to find a job that fitted better with her own ethical standards – a type of behavior she has repeated at different periods of her life.

Widespread popular misconceptions about environmental problems gave Ordóñez a further incentive to display her high level of moral judgement and implement Arcandina. She acknowledged:

“There was an incredible need there, incredibly dramatic, and nobody felt responsible... One day, I read an article in the paper that made me shiver. It said that in 40 years or so there would be no forests left in Ecuador. I felt awful and I mentioned it to a friend. But I got a shock when he replied: 'Why get upset about it, we can start worrying about it 40 years from now'. I didn't say anything at the time, but his response left me horrified... I thought: 'That's what a lot of people think. And they're good people, hard-working people.' And I said to myself, 'Either we do something

today or this trend will be irreversible'... Unsatisfied needs keep growing, so you can't just sit and do nothing."

Similarly:

"If you don't shop responsibly, if you don't save resources at home, and reuse and recycle things, then your attitudes – however innocent they might seem – have a huge destructive impact, multiplied by the thousands of people who do the same. People should understand that there are things that it's best not to buy because they come from companies that are environmentally unfriendly."

Lastly, moral judgment helped her to successfully portray villains in her program objectively and fairly. To achieve this, Ordóñez first had to understand the problem really well before promoting a change in behavior and a deeper sensibility towards nature:

"In Ecuador, you cannot look at a person who fells trees and say he's a villain, because first you have to find out who's responsible. Sure, you can blame the person who sells the timber, though there are exceptions. But you can't point to the poor man who cuts down a tree to sell wood – even cheaply – to feed his family for a week and say he's a villain. You have to offer that poor man an alternative way of living. Now that I'm a mother, if I had to choose between cutting down a tree or letting my baby go hungry, I'd cut down the tree, however much it might hurt! And however complex the situation seems, you have to understand it properly before you can say who's the villain."

Stage 2: The Entrepreneurial Process

Willpower

"I focused on what I wanted, and I went for it, with the conviction that if I did it right, I'd succeed."

Ordóñez attributes her willpower to the fact that, throughout her life, she had been able to achieve all of her important goals. Everything she had dreamed about as a child she was somehow able to make a reality. This motivated her to trust her instincts. Consequently, she consistently displays willpower in everything she does:

"I don't think about the problems. It's as if I had to jump from here to there. I look at the other side without looking at the gap in between. I just look over there because I know that's where I want to get to. Then I jump. Because if I stop and look, I'll hesitate so much that I won't move. I simply concentrate on where I want to be, on what I want, and then I jump."

Her willpower is also reflected in the way Ordóñez adapted to all kinds of unexpected and unwanted circumstances. This particular trait was responsible for Ordóñez's tenacity in continuing with Arcandina despite severe setbacks that would have forced many other individuals to abandon the venture. Those setbacks, which threatened Arcandina's survival, seemed insurmountable. Launched as a for-profit enterprise, Arcandina was temporarily discontinued in Ecuador after its first season (1996-97), because although it had enough sponsors, it was not profitable enough to ensure its continuity. After a second attempt in Ecuador (1999-2000), the program was again discontinued after losing the sponsorship of certain organizations and the support of the Teleamazonas television station. At that point, Ordóñez realized that, given the current state of the television industry,

educational programming for children was not economically appealing. That realization would have tempted many individuals to quit; but instead of quitting, Ordóñez demonstrated her commitment to Arcandina and her audience and displayed great willpower by designing a complex strategic plan for survival. She became determined to find alternative ways, other than television, to keep her message, and Arcandina, alive. She therefore developed a strategy to reduce her dependence on a single television station, which involved high risks and needed additional support. That strategy consisted of the following:

First, Ordóñez designed a variety of activities to spread her message by other means. These included introducing environmental themes into school curriculums; organizing public events; sending out emails with news, facts, and helpful tips; airing short spots on TV; expanding the message through CDs, videotapes, etc.; and promoting live conservation events with life-size versions of the show's puppets. Her previous experience taught her that – as a subsequent move – she should turn Arcandina into a nonprofit organization, which she did in 2000, with the creation of the Arcandina foundation (Fundación Arcandina).

Second, Ordóñez knew that Arcandina did not yet have the capability to carry forward the ambitious plan to spread its message through other distribution channels:

“In the middle of all this, we saw it was important to create an organization that would allow us to grow, as our next step.”

This organization needed two areas, one for fundraising and another for generating its own funds. This was brought home to her at a Prix Jeunesse festival, when a Sesame Street executive gave her a revealing insight:

“He said that after all these years, and despite their gigantic merchandising operation, they still have to do fundraising to finance the program... so we must grow with that reality in mind and plan accordingly.”

The third element of the strategy involved adapting to the fact that television channels were not interested in educational programming for children. That meant designing a new concept to make the programs more commercially appealing:

“Since, here in Ecuador, television stations are not interested in educational programs, it is easier to reach them with a series that has a clear beginning and ending, that is easier to sell, and can be repeated more than once.”

The effort, resources (human and material), time, and risks involved in implementing the new strategy were such that only a determined individual with Ordoñez's willpower would have been capable of pulling it off.

Motivation: Social Impact, Desire to Reach more People, Financial Goals, and Desire for Change

“Nothing motivates us more than the feedback from children and teenagers who tell us that Arcandina changed their lives. Nothing satisfies us more than knowing that what we have done has brought about a change in the life of others.”

Social impact. After the two seasons that Arcandina was on the air (1996-97 and 1999-00), the feedback that Ordóñez received describing how she had affected people's lives

transformed her commitment to Arcandina into a philosophy of life, and motivated her to continue in spite of adversity:

“But when we saw the impact reflected in children’s reactions, their letters, the demand for our show, and its potential, we saw that it was important to work in schools. We learned that when you’ve spent so much time studying, and you discover a reality, that reality becomes your reality, and you just cannot stop doing it... Since we saw the impact of the show... there were Environmental Engineering students who felt inspired by Arcandina, people whose view of life was changed by Arcandina. The kind of thing that makes you say, ‘My God’. You just can’t stop. We got people from the United States who wrote us saying, ‘When your program went off the air in Miami, I realized there’s no other way for my children to see your show. How can I get in touch with you?’ Then, you realize there’s a need and you just cannot stop delivering... When I receive feedback from children who listen and learn our songs, and repeat them... it’s impressive! If I’d seen that our success was only marginal, I’d think twice (do something else). But our impact has been so huge with our audience, the children, that we really have a big tool to solve a problem – more than one – that has to do with the need to educate people – on a massive scale – about how they can change their behavior.”

Desire to reach more people. After her experience in Rinconcito (“Little Corner”) (1980-81) – the first Ecuadorian TV show for children, in 1980, produced by Ecuavisa (a television company) – Ordóñez worked as a kindergarten teacher, first in “El Rincón de los Niños” (1983-85)³ and later in the Colegio Alemán (1985-89). But after the experience of Rinconcito and her own vision of Arcandina, Ordóñez had different plans for her own future:

“It was a beautiful beginning, but I needed to grow... It was a question of impact... How many people could I influence as a teacher? I saw that my work reached something like 50 families, no more. By then I already had experienced what it means to reach thousands with a positive impact (Rinconcito). There was no comparison... Teaching does not compare to the power of television... My idea was to create a regional TV show that would triple the impact. That sounds very tempting, don’t you think?”

While still working as a school teacher, she began to reflect on the limited scope of her work:

“One day, I was taking care of the children and I visualized myself 10 years later in the same place, doing the same thing. I panicked and told Pablo (her husband), ‘We must go to Quito, I must change everything here, because I don’t want to be standing here 10 years from now doing exactly the same thing’.”

As a result, in her first risky initiative, Ordóñez and her husband moved to Quito (1989). She felt professionally stuck in Guayaquil and, with the seed of Arcandina already in mind, hoped for a change:

“I knew that Guayaquil lacked the conditions to develop Arcandina, while in Quito we found a scenario where it was more feasible.”

³ It is common in Ecuador for college students to work full time.

Financial goals. Ordóñez recognized that Arcandina had been created as a for-profit television program in 1996, financed by her husband Pablo, the Government of Ecuador, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)⁴. However, in 2000 she turned it into a nonprofit organization. That change did not mean that money became unimportant. Her goal still was to become a large nonprofit organization with a strong regional brand image:

“My hope is that Arcandina will become the Latin American version of Disney, which naturally will generate a lot of money.”

Referring to an ideal future state, she said bluntly:

“Yes, the thought of someday having enough income to go and live by the beach with my children, so that they grow up in a similar environment to the one I grew up in, that motivates me. Also, I would like to sit down and write books far away from (civilization)... and let others worry about managing... while I write for Arcandina.”

Desire for Change

“That is what strikes me most... it (Arcandina) could help solve real educational problems in this country.”

Realizing the scarcity of educational TV shows for children and aware of Ecuadorians’ careless attitude towards environmental protection, Ordóñez felt a strong desire to be part of a solution, i.e., to create a truly educational national television show and become an agent of change.

The rate of environmental destruction reported by different sources, together with the passive response of the country’s citizens, was a source of frustration and triggered within her a strong sense of urgency to do something about it:

“According to a survey done by CIESPAL⁵ in 1998, 80% of Ecuadorians do not feel personally responsible for environmental protection. That is an overwhelming figure. That is why the need to take action cannot wait any longer.”

Action-oriented traits: Do Things her Way, Ability to Improve, Long-term Focus

Do Things her Way. Ordóñez describes her most important entrepreneurial traits as:

“I always like to do things my way, the way I like them to be done. Basically, that’s it. I always felt I was different from other girls in my group of friends, I think that helped... I accepted it as a personal trait, rather than as a skill or a defect; it was a characteristic that allowed me to do things other girls could not. Because there were lots of things that others could do that maybe I could do too, but don’t feel motivated to do, things that make me feel like a ‘fish out of the water’. In contrast, doing this (Arcandina) I feel I’m in my element.”

⁴ www.ecoisp.com/goodnews11.asp

⁵ Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Comunicación para América Latina (International Center for Advanced Communication Studies for Latin America).

This tendency to do things her way explains the difficulty she has always had in compromising about who she was and how she behaved. During her high-school years, because of her poor grades, she was forced to change from her beloved Colegio Alemán to a religious school, where there were strict rules of behavior. She had been raised in an environment in which many things, such as her relationship with boys, seemed more natural than they seemed to be at her new school. Instead of adapting to the new rules, she stuck to her previously held beliefs, showing little tolerance for unwanted circumstances and a deep commitment to her beliefs.

“When I moved to the Asunción (her new school), it was a drastic change in my life. It was a dark period, and I can’t say I learned much there... no, no, no, it was different, I couldn’t adapt.”

In the end, this same trait helped her to overcome the setbacks Arcandina suffered after its launch. After the second season (1999-00), having lost sponsorship and the support of Teleamazonas, the program was discontinued. That was when Ordóñez realized that educational programming for children was simply not profitable for television stations at that time. Consequently, she decided once again to be creative and do things her way:

“A lot of people have seen our videos, despite their limited air time. We decided that, if it was difficult to get access to our audience via television, we would reach them by other means (public events, live shows, newsletters, the Internet, etc). And that is precisely what we have done. And it is what we want to do with all of our productions. That strategy has made a lot of people aware of Arcandina and has put us in a position where already there is a television station interested in airing the show. But now, if a television station wants a serious and stable relationship with us, given that everything here revolves around sponsors, commercial shows like cartoons, and ratings, it means that they are honestly interested in high quality programs for children.”

Ability to improvise. Opportunities forced Ordóñez to be flexible and improvise in order to capitalize on them. Arcandina’s success has put tremendous pressure on her time and has exceeded her ability to react. For example, she complained that in 2002 she had not been able to meet her marketing budget because she had had to travel to receive unexpected awards, and attend unexpected invitations to environmental events around the world. In addition, she must make arrangements to spend time in Quito with important visitors and supporters:

“So we must learn how to deal with these things, how to manage them, because they are all indispensable. But look what’s happened now: a famous actor, Danny Glover, is coming to Ecuador, precisely in the middle of our production. It creates time pressures, but on the other hand, imagine what this means for us.”

Similarly, other situations forced her to take advantage of opportunities that would increase Arcandina’s reputation. She suffered from stage fright. She has always considered herself to be the sort of person who works behind the scenes. But once, in a presentation in the national theater of the Casa de la Cultura in Quito, she was unexpectedly called onto the stage to say a few words:

“When they called me, I got furious and ran out. I wanted to fire everyone. But the audience was already expecting me to go up and say something, so I said I don’t remember what, and left.”

After that experience, she suddenly realized that, just as Walt Disney's own image was an important part of his success, she could build hers to strengthen Arcandina's brand image:

“So I decided I had to break away from my fears. I decided I was not going to care anymore about how I looked on camera.”

After this change of attitude, she appeared in several videos, interacting with her characters:

“This had such an impact that it led to my receiving the National Wildlife Foundation award... I started to have a higher profile in the press and to understand its importance, because it's another way of getting a message across. It was a difficult learning process... but I had to get rid of my ego.”

She even raised her profile internationally, being invited, more than once, to participate in the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Long-term focus. Ordóñez has demonstrated a long-term focus that has guided her decisions and actions and strengthened Arcandina's competitive position. The first crucial decision in which Ordóñez prioritized the long over the short term was regarding the role each stakeholder would play in the first Arcandina production. The director of a very important television show in Germany developed the first version of Arcandina in Ecuador. It got to the point where this organization suggested that they should create the muppets, leaving production to a local television station:

“But then I said, ‘And what's left in it for me?’ I realized that the only way forward for us was to assume the investment risks with the muppets because the only way to guarantee the long-term survival of Arcandina was to remain the owner. The idea was developed with a long-term focus, in other words, to be regional, and to last, because if you want to create a huge impact you must think long-term.”

A second decision that reflected her long-term orientation was crucial to Arcandina's brand reputation, one of Ordóñez's clearest priorities. Although it was economically tempting, she turned down an offer from an important consumer goods company in Ecuador.

“I remember, once, a company came to us with its product (a juice for children) and said they wanted to sponsor us. All they wanted was to have their little clown (their trademark logo) appear on the show. I realized this was not suitable, because the moment they finished launching their product, Arcandina would be dead... now, instead, Arcandina has a presence. Either you receive an email from us, or you see us somewhere else.”

She suspected that the sponsor was too influenced by ratings, which made it likely the contract would be canceled at the first sign of trouble and the show would be taken off the air to give way to some other program. Other tempting proposals came from television stations, but as mentioned previously, Ordóñez wants above all to preserve the Arcandina brand, accepting only offers that she feels have a low risk of leading to an interruption of its programming in the middle of a season:

“Being on and off the air constantly is damaging. It’s better if people know that you’re back, even for a short period, than if they believe you’re going to be on air for a whole year and it turns out you’re not.”

Support

In addition to willpower, support was indispensable for Ordóñez to embark on her initiative. Support for Arcandina included the personal, financial, administrative, and technical aspects needed for the venture. Once the opportunity had been constructed, the combination of willpower and support facilitated the birth of Arcandina. Ordóñez received organizational and individual support.

Organizations

“Arcandina was only possible because so many people supported us... with contributions from all over... until you just don’t know what to say.”

In her search for the know-how that would shape Arcandina’s content, Ordóñez not only contacted important organizations, but also requested their assistance. (1) Prix Jeunesse and the Goethe Institute provided specific knowledge of low-cost programming. (2) The Johns Hopkins University, after testing the impact Arcandina had on its audience, decided to contribute to its production financially and technically.

Other organizations have also supported and helped Arcandina to adapt:

The Ashoka Foundation, which supports social entrepreneurs worldwide, accepted Ordóñez as a Fellow in 2000. As an Ashoka Fellow, Ordóñez received a monthly stipend that helped her to devote herself entirely to her initiative.

In 2002, the National Wildlife Federation granted Arcandina the Best International Environmental Program Award 2001, and in 2003 the Schwab Foundation gave her the Outstanding Social Entrepreneur Award. Both organizations have helped to raise Ordóñez’s international profile to a level that has facilitated the gathering of further support for Arcandina.

Ordóñez has signed a contract with the Universidad Casa Grande of Guayaquil to let students – as a class requirement – develop Arcandina’s website:

“Other people have joined us, friendly people, who are helping us grow... I think this would normally cost thousands, but for us it is free!”

Another foundation, Challenger Worldwide, which discovered Ordóñez through Ashoka, provides Arcandina with technically competent volunteers. Three have participated already, and more will come to Ecuador in the future:

“They send us people with an incredible background and expertise. Katie (a British volunteer) has helped a lot. She is the art director for the process of designing the characters of the movie we are about to make. She will also be a camerawoman, she even brought her own camera. She has incredible know-how. Part of her background is having worked in the making of the movie Star Wars.”

With the aid of the Johns Hopkins University, Ordóñez tested the characters in focus groups, in which 80% of the children taking part said they would watch the program⁶. This test provided important feedback that led to the discovery of Arcandina's most innovative element. After discovering that her concept was very educational but not entertaining enough, she decided to increase the fictional elements in the show:

“We decided there would be a villain – a rat that loves garbage, because that is a very common theme throughout Latin America: the garbage, the bad habits, the idea of the city as a big garbage dump. Then I decided I was going to deal with this issue in every show and that the best vehicle to transmit this message was a rat. Ratasura turned out to be the most entertaining, beloved, and best remembered character.”

Individuals. In 1999, after all the difficulty Arcandina was having in staying on the air, Ordóñez needed to create an organization in order to survive and transform her initiative into something bigger and more structured than a TV program. At that point, however, with two children of her own to look after, Ordóñez considered herself to have entered a different life stage, in which work was no longer the center. Simultaneously, Arcandina had to enter a different stage in order to survive – a stage that would require more of her time. That dilemma was solved when Pablo, her husband, then a consultant at the Johns Hopkins University, agreed to get involved full time with Arcandina:

“It is difficult because after just three years of marriage, we started to have our children. Now, I have two children, one aged two, and the youngest, who's just one year old. This coincided with a time when we needed to grow as an organization, but at the same time confront this new stage in my life. Fortunately, Pablo got involved, which gave us breathing space, with both of us in Arcandina, while keeping our role as parents.”

Pablo's support thus became a crucial decision that helped the organization adapt to a new situation:

“Pablo was always there in my weak moments, when I said ‘I don't want to have any more to do with this!’, telling me, ‘We must go on, we must’.”

She also had the support of well known international celebrities such as Julie Belafonte – honorary member of the Arcandina Foundation and wife of Harry Belafonte – and Danny Glover, who was due to participate in the next Arcandina movie in the Galapagos Islands:

“Can you imagine what this means? It opens doors for us, our operating costs decrease, because otherwise we would not be able to afford them. One thing leads to the next. It's impressive.”

Opportunity Construction

If opportunity recognition occurs when an individual combines resources in innovative ways to solve a social problem, Ordóñez recognized Arcandina after combining the three elements that form the initiative: nature (content), children (audience), and television (distribution channel).

⁶ *Hoy*, June 19, 1996. Ecuador

“That is what I was doing... you see that somehow everything started to be related.”

María Elena Ordóñez did not discover Arcandina in a one-step process, and she certainly did not consciously search for it. Rather, she gradually constructed it by getting involved in each of the three elements that made up the idea – nature (content), children (audience) and television (distribution channel) – at different but early periods of her life, as if they were unrelated to each other.

Since individuals accumulate different experiences and are subjected to different salient events, it follows that they must differ in their choice of resources to combine. Therefore, all opportunities will not be obvious to all people all the time.

Salient events: Career Choice and the Discovery of Television

Career choice. The career choice turned out to be a crucial step in the construction of the opportunity, because it was how Ordóñez started dealing with children, and how she gained expertise about her future audience. However, like other young people, before setting out on a career, she went through a turbulent period in which she considered a wide range of careers, including ballet. During this confusing period, a salient event inclined her towards children as a career choice. On the one hand, her mother was persuading her to study literature since she had already proven her creative and writing skills. On the other hand, she knew her childhood had been the happiest period of her life and suspected she wanted to study something related to children:

“I had to properly understand the ones who were to become my audience.”

A vocational and psychological test she took did not help either, as the results showed that she was a very versatile person, with skills to study anything she wanted.

Despite this good news, the results left her where she had started. The turning point came during a field trip with other families (the salient event), which included an ill-disciplined child. She took it as a challenge:

“If I can manage to build a good relationship with this kid during the trip, it means I’m good at this, so I’ll study Education. If not, I won’t.”

As it turned out, by the end of the week she had managed to spend time with the child, to understand him, and to do entertaining things together. After that, in 1980, she enrolled in the Catholic University of Guayaquil to study Infant and Primary Education and settled her mind on the second element that constitutes Arcandina: its audience (children). At that stage in her life, Ordóñez had already been involved with two of the three elements that compose Arcandina: its content (nature) and its audience (children). The third element, the distribution channel (television), she discovered during her university years.

The discovery of television

“Children – imagine the most economically deprived group – have to go to our public schools, where education leaves much to be desired. They get home, they don’t have cable, so they have to make do with our national programming, and they watch four to five hours of that garbage every day. On the other hand, I know

the impact that TV could have if there were shows worth watching. It's then that you realize we're wasting a very valuable resource (television)."

During her university years, a second salient event played a decisive role in the opportunity recognition process:

"I was in the first Ecuadorian TV show for children. It was called 'Rinconcito' ('Little Corner') and was produced by the television company Ecuavisa. Between 1980 and 1981, I took part in Rinconcito behind the scenes. It was incredible because – and this is perfectly true – I went to talk to the Director, who was a family friend, when I heard the show was going to be produced. I was still in college, studying education, but I told her I had to work on the program, even without pay – for free – because I wanted to be involved."

Ordóñez's gut-feeling was that this was an important decision, and so she pursued it regardless of the cost:

"I told myself 'I really must study this more'."

And so – in what was a tough decision for her – she broke off her studies (she would return to graduate a few years later), and temporarily devoted herself to Rinconcito on a full-time basis:

"I wasn't in a rush to finish university in 78, 79, 82, or 83. What I wanted was to do Rinconcito, and do it well."

Consequently, she became involved as an assistant in the production of the show, an experience that strongly influenced her motivations to create the future Arcandina. First, she realized the usefulness of television as an educational medium, i.e., through Rinconcito she learned how television can convey behavior-changing messages. Secondly, she became aware of her abilities:

"There, I learned that I had an innate ability to write scripts and produce, because without any previous knowledge or television experience, my director and the people in charge of production were very pleased with my work. They told me, 'you have a special ability'. That motivated me to continue."

She had just discovered the third element of Arcandina, the communication channel, and combined them with the other two – nature, and children – to create the Arcandina concept:

"When Rinconcito finished, that was when I discovered what I wanted to do."

Prior Experience

Between 1980 and 1996, Ordóñez accumulated the experience that enabled her to construct the opportunity. During that period she developed the necessary expertise with the three elements that composed Arcandina:

"It was my years in college that allowed me to blend the things that I liked (nature, children, television)."

Ordóñez's prior experience with nature did not need to be profound in order to construct Arcandina. During the opportunity construction period, it was limited to her passion for protecting the environment and the superficial information typically found in public sources about Ecuador's environmental problems.

Her prior experience with children was built in her college years and later working years. (1) Between 1980 and 1985 she studied Infant and Primary Education at the Universidad Católica de Guayaquil. (2) Between 1983 and 1993 she worked in various educational centers as a kindergarten teacher (El Rincón de los Niños, Colegio Alemán, Centro Educativo Integral, El Celestín).

Her prior experience with television production developed from her involvement in the TV show "Rinconcito" as Production Assistant (1980-81), her work as freelance scriptwriter (1981-85), and her participation as scriptwriter in the television show "Laberinto" (1988-89).

After the discovery of the opportunity, Ordóñez continued constructing it, gathering further experience with each of the three elements (nature, children, TV) that allowed her to increase Arcandina's degree of innovation.

For example, she developed specific knowledge about television. She received a scholarship to attend the Prix Jeunesse Festival of television shows for children (1990-92) in Venezuela:

"It was there that I met what I consider to be the godfathers of Arcandina, which were the organizations Prix Jeunesse and the Goethe Institute. They showed us some low-budget television programs, and their possibilities, which motivated us to work and use television as a potent medium to transmit positive messages through high quality programming."

At a later stage, she also learned more about children. Between 1991 and 1993, she discovered a new pedagogical concept for children through her sister, who was studying Integral Language in the United States.

"This pedagogical concept departed from all the theories I had studied and practiced... I took a sabbatical year and started learning and writing about it. That, along with environmental issues, became my philosophy of life. I had to put it into practice, promoting reading and writing habits in children. This even helped me understand children from a more serious perspective. Not as human beings in the making, but as complete human beings at a different stage of development."

Lastly, because her interest in nature and conservation had been with her throughout her life, and on account of her perception that Ecuadorian biodiversity was under threat, between 1993 and 1996 she decided to become a self-taught expert in environmental issues. By that time, she already had failed in her first attempt to launch a regional program, but clearly felt the urge to continue. She knew, at that point, that she needed to deepen her knowledge on environmental issues in order to develop the core creative concept for a future program:

"That was part of the process of developing the concept. But I did it (study) not just because I had to develop a creative concept, but because the concept itself involved conveying important messages. Expectations must be encompassed by real needs, and to serve them (the expectations), we had to have a very profound knowledge of what was going on with the environment; at the same time, we had to develop our own point of view. If you watch Discovery Kids, you'll notice that there

are many programs about nature, but none of them deals with any change in behavior... So I devoted myself to researching environmental issues to choose our own concept.”

Discussion

As the case of María Elena Ordóñez illustrates, social entrepreneurs, like (traditional) entrepreneurs, may also be subject to perceptions of desirability and feasibility, and propensity to act, before developing the intention to create and pursue their ventures. However, our findings suggest that the path through which perceptions of desirability and feasibility, and propensity to act, develop may differ. First, as prior research suggests, individuals who start a business venture are subject to exogenous factors, such as quality and quantity of prior entrepreneurial experiences. Our study suggests that individuals who form the intention to create a social venture may develop social sentiments that bias them towards social issues, regardless of their previous entrepreneurial experience. Second, previous studies indicate that traditional entrepreneurs perceive a business venture as desirable after evaluating personal preferences and social norms. The case under study suggests that social entrepreneurs may develop perceptions of desirability as soon as they construct or – more generally – recognize an opportunity. Ordóñez’s case suggests an immediate link between the construction of the opportunity and the desire to pursue it (i.e., create a social venture). Third, according to the entrepreneurship literature, entrepreneurs perceive a venture as feasible if they experience high self efficacy and high collective efficacy. The case examined in this paper indicates that social entrepreneurs develop perceptions of feasibility after securing support, both from individuals and organizations. This does not imply that social entrepreneurs are risk averse. It merely highlights that, in the case of social entrepreneurship, feasibility is a matter of gathering the required resources to launch a venture. Fourth, the data of this study suggest that social entrepreneurs develop propensity to act (an important antecedent of behavioral intentions) through willpower, triggered by action-oriented traits and their motivation.

The results of the analysis of Ordóñez’s case signal that social entrepreneurship should not be treated as a subordinate field of study, but rather as a different context in which to study entrepreneurship. We believe that our findings make the entrepreneurship literature and theory more robust by demonstrating the applicability of an intentions-based model to social entrepreneurs.

Lastly, the findings of this study cannot be extrapolated to all social entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, from these findings, metrics can be developed to generalize these results to all social entrepreneurs that share Ordóñez’s profile, that is, all individuals who combine resources in innovative ways to pursue opportunities aimed at the creation of organizations and/or practices that generate social value. For example, empathy and moral judgment could serve as indicators for social sentiments. By the same token, type of motivation and action-oriented traits could serve as indicators for the degree of willpower. Similarly, social capital – a concept used in the entrepreneurship literature – may be used as the indicator for the degree of support achieved by the social entrepreneur. And finally, prior experience and salient events may be effective indicators of opportunity construction.

Limitations of the Study

Undoubtedly, the key limitation of this study is the accuracy of some of Ordóñez’s responses, given that some of the events she referred to occurred many years ago. However,

the authors of this research ensured the reliability and validity of the findings, following the suggestions of Miller, Cardinal, et al. (1997). First, the researcher who interviewed Ordóñez at no time forced or biased the response to a question, and always let the interviewee respond freely (free recall). Second, the authors utilized multiple sources or informants to corroborate Ordóñez's responses, such as three co-workers, her husband, and her parents. In other words, the researchers chose to interview those closest to Ordóñez, those who knew her best as a person and as a social entrepreneur. Third, the researchers tried to base their findings on facts recalled by Ordóñez, instead of opinions. Lastly, to increase her motivation to collaborate, the interviewer told Ordóñez about the usefulness of the project and the effort and time invested in gathering the data.

Conclusions

Ordóñez's work as a social entrepreneur has aimed at, and has successfully achieved, social value creation. We have tried to provide rigorous knowledge on one social entrepreneur to widen the scope of current research beyond a description of who a social entrepreneur is. We have also attempted to call the attention of entrepreneurship scholars, arguing that the world of ideas, innovation, and opportunity are not the exclusive domain of traditional entrepreneurs.

Our findings reveal that – similar to traditional entrepreneurs – social entrepreneurs develop the intention to start a social venture after experiencing perceptions of feasibility and desirability, and a propensity to act. Nevertheless, in a first stage, social entrepreneurs develop a strong devotion to other people, or ideals (social sentiments). Afterwards, the degree of support, the recognition of an opportunity, and willpower influence – respectively – the perceptions of feasibility and desirability, and propensity to act.

This study suggests that entrepreneurship aimed at social and economic value creation represents a fruitful area for exploration. On the one hand, we discovered similarities to traditional entrepreneurship in processes and mechanisms; on the other, we found differences in the antecedents of intention creation. Further empirical research is necessary to establish whether social entrepreneurship is an independent field of research or a special setting to study entrepreneurship. Independent of the outcome of this debate, the study of social ventures and social entrepreneurs offers an exciting opportunity to advance the field of entrepreneurship.

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