Navigating uncertainty and finding purpose in social mission-driven organizations

Emma Sandström
Navigating uncertainty and finding purpose in social mission-driven organizations

Emma Sandström
Supervising professor
Professor Henri Schildt, Aalto University, Finland

Thesis advisor
Associate Professor Farah Kodeih, IÉSEG School of Management, France

Preliminary examiners
Professor Thomas Roulet, University of Cambridge, UK
Associate Professor Sophie Alkhaled, Lancaster University, UK

Opponent
Professor Thomas Roulet, University of Cambridge, UK
Abstract

This doctoral dissertation investigates the work of social mission-driven organizations operating in contexts of uncertainty. By understanding how disruptive events affect organizations and their members' sense of purpose and meaningfulness, research can provide valuable insights into how these organizations can continue to create social impact in turbulent times. My thesis thus examines how uncertainty impacts social mission, purpose, and organizational members' perceptions of meaningful work in these shifting contexts. I explore these questions through three empirical studies.

The first essay explains how a social initiative copes with dynamic uncertainty while planning a future event in a highly uncertain context. The findings contribute to the literature on sensemaking and uncertainty by showing how teams, through different strategies, can facilitate collective sensemaking under dynamic uncertainty by shaping the premises and temporal scope of the sensemaking situation.

In the second essay, I examine the work of host-country aid workers during a compound crisis. This research contributes to the literature on meaningful work by demonstrating how societal events can undermine a sense of meaningfulness and how organizational members can restore it through "meaningful work".

The third essay explores how members influence the formation and evolution of organizational purpose in a nascent social venture. This essay contributes to the literature by highlighting the organizational members' role in this process and theorizing organizational purpose as a nexus that connects organizational members to the social issues, they find important. Our empirical analysis shows how members create bottom-up pressures that shift the social purpose towards having a concrete impact on beneficiaries.

The three different perspectives on social organizations in contexts of uncertainty contribute to our understanding of social mission-driven organizations by examining their specific challenges and dynamics of organizational membership.
Navigating uncertainty and finding purpose in social mission-driven organizations

Emma Sandström

Tiivistelmä


Toisessa esessessä tarkastellaan paikallisten avustustyöntekijöiden työtä kriisitilanteessa. Tämä tutkimus edistää kirjallisuutta merkityksellisestä työstä osoittamalla, miten yhteiskunnalliset tapahtumat voivat herättää merkityksellisyyden tunnetta ja miten organisaation jäsenet tarkoituksellisen ja tietoisien pyrkimyksen kautta voivat palauttaa sen.

Kolmas essee tutkii organisaatiojäsenten vaikutusta organisaation tarkoituksen muodostumiseen ja kehittymiseen aloittavassa sosiaalisessa yrityksessä. Tämä essee avaa uusia näkökulmia kirjallisuuteen korostaen jäsenten roolia tässä prosessissa ja teoreetisoimalla, kuinka organisaation tarkoitus auttaa kytkemään organisaation jäsenet heille tärkeisiin yhteiskunnallisiin kysymyksiin. Empirisessä analyysissämme näytämme, miten jäsenet muokkaavat yrityksen tarkoituksista kohti jaettua ymmärrystä ja toimintamalleja, jotka tarjoavat konkreettisempia hyötyjä avunsaajille.

Nämä kolme erilaista näkökulmaa sosiaalisin yrityksiin epävarmoissa konteksteissa edistävät ymmärrystämme sosiaalisista organisaatioista avaamalla niiden kohtaamia haasteita sekä sosiaalisten yritysten ja niiden jäsenten välistä dynamiikkaa.

Avainsanat

ISSN (painettu) 1799-4934 ISSN (pdf) 1799-4942
Julkaisupaikka Helsinki Painopaikka Helsinki Vuosi 2023
Acknowledgements

Writing a doctoral dissertation is a collective effort. As Ph.D. candidates, we are forming our own paths but are simultaneously profoundly influenced by our surrounding community. I am immensely grateful to numerous academic colleagues, family members, and friends who have been integral to this journey. In many ways, writing these words of gratitude feels like the most important task in wrapping up this dissertation.

First, I would like to extend my appreciation to my supervisor Henri Schildt. Thank you for your unwavering support, patience, and encouragement. Despite your busy schedule and countless responsibilities, you always made time to provide feedback on manuscripts and assist me whenever I needed advice. Thank you for all these years, but especially for the last months when I was finalizing the dissertation -your support was truly invaluable.

Farah Kodeih, my deepest gratitude goes out to you for nudging me toward academia. You have literally altered the course of my life, not once but twice. First, by encouraging me to embark on this path before I even was a Ph.D. student, and secondly, by inviting me to join you on a data collection trip to Lebanon back in 2017. There was no turning back after this. Thank you for your support and friendship.

Additionally, I want to express a tremendous thank you to my pre-examiners Thomas Roulet from Cambridge Judge Business School and Sophie Alkhaled from Lancaster University. Thank you for taking the time to review this work. Your valuable and insightful comments are immensely helpful for further improving the papers included in the dissertation. I also extend a special thanks to Thomas Roulet for accepting the role as my opponent.

Apart from the supervising team, several individuals have given insightful feedback and encouragement throughout the dissertation process, and I remain grateful to each one of you. I want to thank Nina Granqvist for your valuable comments and support at different stages of my PhD journey. You have been an inspiration as an academic, as well as given great advice on how to forge one’s own path when new to the field. I would also like to thank Myrto Chliova for your detailed comments during the last tutorial.

To all the current and former Aalto University colleagues and beyond, I extend my sincere appreciation: Alice, Allu, Ana, Anna, Anoop, Anastasia, Anne-Sophie, Arne, Ari, Astrid, Alexei, Aleksi, Davide, Dina, Derin, Eero, Eeva-Lotta, Ewald, Gloria, Hanne, Hani, Heli H, Heli N, Hilla, Inês, Iana, Iqra, Joona, Johanna, Jori, Jukka, Jukka-Pekka, Kaja, Karelia, Katharina, Kathrin, Kristiina,
Lauri, Laura, Leni, Lin, Luna, Maikki, Marjukka, Mark, Marleen, Martta, Mickael, Minna, Myrto, Natalia, Olli, Oona, Pauli, Philip, Rebecca, Saija, Saku, Samuli, Siddhant, Seonyoung, Sofia, Tamara, Taija, Tilman, Tiia, Tomi, and Valentina. Thank you for all the wonderful encounters.

I want to give special mention to Oona Hilkamo and Iana Nesterova. Oona, thank you for being an incredible office friend, teaching and writing together, and starting new inspiring projects that hopefully continue for years to come. Iana, your radiant personality, and unique perspective have been a joy. I will always remember the day I submitted the dissertation, and you stayed to support me at the office until late at night.

Several foundations have provided financial support for this project. My gratitude goes to the Marcus Wallenberg Foundation, the Academy of Finland, Liikesivistysrahasto, and the HSE Foundation. I would also like to thank everyone who generously participated in the interviews that formed the foundation of this dissertation. I am grateful for the time you dedicated to sharing your experiences, especially considering that many of you work under extreme pressure and in challenging conditions. I thank you for your trust and for letting me take part of your world.

I extend heartfelt thanks to many friends who have played a crucial role in helping me take breaks from the dissertation. A special thanks to Sophia, Heidi, Gaurang, and Srividya -thank you for your long-lasting friendships, many fun moments, and the profound conversations that extend far beyond academia.

Most importantly, I want to thank my family for their support: my parents, Marita and Ralf, my brother Edvin, my sister-in-law Sarah Zi, their son Aron, my sister Ellen, and my son Lucas. Special recognition is needed for the latter two.

Ellen, at the time of writing this, you live in Stockholm rather than as my next-door neighbor, as you did during most of my dissertation process. Going through challenging times together (and with this, I do not mean the dissertation) carves a person deeper into your heart than ordinary day-to-day life does. There is no way to say "thank you" that would accurately convey the gratitude I feel for you for being there during those days. When I say I cannot imagine how I would have done this without you, I really mean it. And not just this dissertation but life in general. For many years, you were my main support, the person to rely on. You have made life infinitely better.

Lucas, in many ways, we grew up together. You have been the center-point of my whole adult life. You were a child when I started this process, and now you are a remarkable teenager. It is with immense admiration that I look at you. You put everything in perspective. I love you from the depth of my heart.

My deepest gratitude goes out to all of you.

Helsinki, 14 July 2023
Emma Sandström
Contents

1. Introduction ................................................................................................. 7
   1.1 Research focus and aim of the study .................................................. 8
   1.2 Structure of the dissertation ............................................................... 9
2. Theoretical premises .................................................................................. 10
   2.1 Social mission-driven organizations ................................................. 10
   2.2 Forms of social-mission driven organizations ................................. 11
   2.3 Challenges in social mission-driven organizations ....................... 13
   2.4 Member experiences in social mission-driven organizations: purpose and meaningfulness, identification, and dynamic uncertainty .......... 14
      2.4.1 Purpose and meaningfulness .................................................. 15
      2.4.2 Identification ........................................................................... 16
      2.4.3 Uncertainty as a context for organizing .................................. 18
3. Methodology .................................................................................................. 20
   3.1 The empirical context: refugee and compound crisis .................... 20
   3.2 Research approach ............................................................................. 21
   3.3 Data collection .................................................................................... 22
   3.4 Analysis .............................................................................................. 25
   3.5 A personal methodological reflection about doing fieldwork in Lebanon .............................................................................................. 26
4. Summaries of the essays ............................................................................. 29
   4.1 Essay 1: Coping with dynamic uncertainty: How reframing strategies facilitate collective sensemaking ......................................................... 29
   4.2 Essay 2: “When the helpers need help”: Finding meaningfulness at work in a compound crisis ................................................................. 30
   4.3 Essay 3: In search for purpose: How members shape the formation and evolution of social purpose in nascent social ventures ................ 31
5. Discussion ....................................................................................................... 34
   5.1 Embracing uncertainty in organizational life .................................... 35
   5.2 Acknowledging the depth of meaningfulness and purpose .................. 36
5.3 What can social mission-driven organizations tell us about the future of work? ............................................................ 38
5.4 Limitations of the study ..................................................... 40
5.5 Suggestions for further research ..................................... 41
5.6 Concluding remarks ......................................................... 42
6. References ........................................................................ 44
Essays ................................................................................ 51
List of Essays

This doctoral dissertation consists of a summary and the following three essays.


3. Kodeih, Farah; Schildt, Henri; Sandström, Emma; Ravasi, Davide; Heikkilä Jukka-Pekka (manuscript under review). In search for purpose: How members shape the formation and evolution of social purpose in nascent social ventures.
Author’s Contribution

**Essay 1:** Coping with dynamic uncertainty: How reframing strategies facilitate collective sensemaking.

Emma Sandström, was the lead author of this essay. She developed the research idea and was responsible for data collection and analysis. She was also responsible for the initial choice of framing and authored the results and discussion in the light of the data.

**Essay 2:** “When the helpers need help”: Finding meaningfulness at work in a compound crisis.

Emma Sandström was the sole author of this essay.

**Essay 3:** In search for purpose: How members shape the formation and evolution of social purpose in nascent social ventures.

Emma Sandström, was involved in data collection at an early stage and took responsibility for the initial data analysis. She was responsible for writing the methods and findings together with the first author. She participated in the development of the contributions and discussion.
Management and organization scholars have long been fascinated by questions related to organizing for improved social outcomes. This is reflected in streams of research on social enterprises and ventures (Battilana et al., 2022; Besharov, 2022), organizational purpose and mission (Jasinenko & Steuber, 2022), the moral underpinnings of social venture missions (Lucas & Park, 2023), organizational members’ experiences and perceptions of meaningful work (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), and callings (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017).

Prior literature has shown that social missions can effectively engage various stakeholder groups (Besharov, 2014; Minkoff & Powell, 2006; Kouamé et al., 2022). For instance, a strong organizational mission or purpose is connected to the experience of meaningful work (Jasinenko & Steuber, 2022; Rosso et al., 2010). On the other hand, “social mission-driven organizations” (Kouamé et al., 2022, p. 1864) also face distinct challenges, such as tensions between the enactment of their social mission and business goals (Jacobs et al., 2021; Smith & Besharov, 2019). Organizational members’ strong connection to an organizational mission or purpose is connected to several positive organizational outcomes. Yet, they remain vulnerable to strong adverse reactions should they feel the mission or purpose being violated (Rosso et al., 2010), which is especially likely to happen in volatile contexts.

Despite the increasing interest, most studies have explored social mission-driven organizations in relatively stable contexts. As organizations more frequently encounter complex environments troubled by "dynamic uncertainty" (Christianson & Barton, 2021), it is crucial to develop a better understanding of the distinct challenges social mission-driven organizations and their members face under these conditions. For instance, we have limited knowledge of how members deal with uncertainty and how it influences their perceptions of meaningfulness and purpose.

Often the operations are complicated in areas where the need for social mission-driven organizations is the greatest. For example, since 2019, Lebanon
has faced extreme dynamic uncertainty in the form of a financial crisis with hyperinflation, violent protests, a pandemic as well as a large explosion that killed hundreds, injured thousands, and had a devastating effect on the infrastructure in downtown Beirut (WFP report, 2020). In such contexts, the needs of people are being addressed by various social mission-driven organizations, navigating the same challenges as the people they serve.

This type of context consisting of several crisis situations can be described as a compound crisis, meaning that several crisis events interact with compounding effects. Although not necessarily recognized as such, one could argue that a large part of the world is facing a compound crisis consisting of climate change, the aftermaths of a pandemic combined with various local challenges such as wars and natural disasters. Thus, it is important to understand organizing in these contexts. Previous research on organizing and organizational members’ experiences in uncertain contexts has generally done so in one-time crisis events or disasters (Srivastava, 1992; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1988). Disruptions, however, are often caused by chains of events with cumulative impact (Roulet & Bhotello, 2022). These chains of events may have a significantly larger transformative effect on society and organizations, and it is important to understand how organizations and organizational members transform along these events.

1.1 Research focus and aim of the study

This dissertation addresses social mission-driven organizations and their members in three different contexts: (1) a social initiative team planning an entrepreneurship event in Beirut, (2) aid workers in Lebanon, and (3) a nascent social venture in Finland. The overall aim of the dissertation is to advance our understanding of social mission-driven organizations by examining their specific challenges and dynamics of organizational membership in uncertain contexts. To explore the overarching theme of this dissertation: How do social mission-driven organizations find their purpose and sustain meaningfulness in uncertain contexts? I ask the following research questions:

1. What strategies can a social initiative team use to cope with dynamic uncertainty and facilitate sensemaking?
2. How do aid workers sustain a sense of meaningfulness amidst a compound crisis?
3. How do organizational members shape the formation and evolution of social purpose in nascent social ventures?
To answer the research questions, I collected data between 2017 and 2023 in Finland and Lebanon. The data set consists of 114 semi-structured interviews, 80 instances of observation (including 23 hours of meeting recordings), and 743 pages of archival data. My analysis followed an interpretative approach (Gephart, 2004).

The first essay explains how a social initiative copes with dynamic uncertainty while planning a future event. The essay contributes to the literature on sensemaking by elaborating on how reframing strategies can facilitate sense-making under dynamic uncertainty by shaping the temporal scope and premises of the situation. The second essay investigates the work of host-country aid workers amidst a compound crisis. It contributes to the meaningful work literature by explaining how societal-level shifts can influence the experienced sources of meaningfulness at work. The third essay explores how members shape the formation and evolution of social purpose in a nascent social venture. The findings contribute to our understanding of organizational members’ role in the formation and evolution of social purpose in a nascent social organization by showing how tensions between members’ and founders’ construals shape the construction of purpose. This dissertation advances our understanding of social mission-driven organizations by examining their specific challenges and dynamics of organizational membership.

1.2 Structure of the dissertation

This is an essay-based dissertation consisting of two parts. Part 1 is an introductory chapter and part 2 consists of three independent essays.

In the first part, I introduce the background and the aim of this dissertation. In addition, I outline the theoretical premises that form the theoretical framework for the study. I then provide an overview of the empirical context, the data collection, and data analysis and reflect on doing fieldwork in an uncertain context. In the fourth section of part 1, I summarize the three essays, including the choice of theoretical framing, methods, findings, and contributions of each study. In addition, in the fifth section, I provide a thematic discussion of the contributions of this dissertation. To conclude, I reflect on the limitation of the study and opportunities for further research. Part 2 presents the three essays.
2. Theoretical premises

While the literature on social mission-driven organizations serves as a backdrop for all three individual studies, I use different theoretical lenses to further explore the salient empirical phenomena in each of the studies. In this section, I will first give an overview of the literature on social missions and social mission-driven organizations. I start by defining social missions and the main forms of social mission-driven organizations: social enterprises and non-profit organizations. Next, I outline the common characteristics that separate them from purely profit-driven organizations as well as the specific challenges and opportunities these organizations face when aiming to achieve improved social outcomes. Second, I present the main concepts crucial for understanding the dynamics of organizational membership in contemporary social mission-driven organizations, such as meaningfulness and purpose, identification, and experienced and contextual uncertainty.

2.1 Social mission-driven organizations

Social mission-driven organization is an umbrella term defined by Kouamé et al. (2022, p. 1866) as "organizations focused on pursuing a mission aimed at improving social outcomes". Mission is defined as an organization's orientation or purpose (Grimes et al., 2019), and missions both motivate and limit the scope of possible activities (Minkoff & Powell, 2006). The degree to which organizations succeed in realizing their social missions has been conceptualized as creating social value (Kroeger & Weber, 2014). For instance, in the context of nonprofits, Minkoff and Powell (2006, p. 593) define mission as being concerned with "creating social value or contributing to public good," thus meaning the "positive change initiated by a social intervention" (Kroeger & Weber, 2014, p. 8) experienced by beneficiaries. The pursuit of a social mission and an ideological orientation can effectively attract and engage volunteers and other stakeholders (Minkoff & Powell, 2006). Oster (1995) suggests that organizational
mission may play a highlighted role in non-profit organizations compared to traditional for-profit organizations, as an important organizational advantage for non-profits is their ability to engage people based on the perceived commitment to a cause. In addition, social missions are a core component of an organization's identity and thus shape its strategy and organizational practices (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2020). In this dissertation, I define social mission as "an organizational mission aimed at addressing social needs".

The idealist or social mission in social enterprises can clash with the pursuit of pragmatist economic missions (for instance, Jacobs et al., 2021; Ashfort & Reingen, 2014). Some organizations, like non-profits or non-governmental organizations, may have purely social goals, while others, for instance, social enterprises, may adopt a dual purpose and thus balance their social goals with economic goals (Battilana et al., 2022). The need to manage these dualities explains many of the key challenges and characteristics of social mission-driven organizations.

2.2 Forms of social-mission driven organizations

Social mission-driven organizations form parts of civil society, which consists of the non-profit sector, non-governmental organizations, grassroots associations, social movements, and social enterprises and entrepreneurs (Edwards, 2013). Next, I define the two main forms of social mission-driven organizations relevant to the scope of this dissertation: (1) social enterprises or ventures (2) non-profits and non-governmental organizations.

**Social enterprises.** Social enterprises have become an increasingly important topic in management and organization studies. Despite the lack of specific definitions, social enterprises are generally understood to be organizations integrating “social welfare and commercial aims in the organizations core” (Wry & York, 2017, p. 437). Thus, social enterprises are distinct from traditional for-profit organizations, for which profit is the primary purpose, and corporate social responsibility is an add-on. They are also distinct from non-profits that rely on donors to reach their social aims (Dacin et al., 2011; Wry & York, 2017). Scholars have studied social enterprises such as microfinance organizations (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Hudon et al., 2020; Zhao & Wry, 2016), work integration companies (Pache & Santos, 2013a) and an information technology company helping disadvantaged people access “better economic futures” Smith & Besharov (2019, p. 5) among others. As demonstrated by the examples, social enterprises are not restricted to a particular field but rather characterized by the
combination of social and business missions that can contribute to solving social problems (Besharov, 2022).

**Non-profit organizations and non-governmental organizations.**

Non-profit organizations can operate in various fields, such as education, health, environment, and disaster relief (Hwang & Powell, 2009). The defining characteristic of non-profit organizations is that surplus funds are not distributed to owners or founders but are used for the development of the organization or its goals. However, being registered as a non-profit does not automatically mean that the organization has a social mission. Non-profit organization, as a term, covers a vast range of organizations as all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are non-profits, while non-profits are not necessarily NGOs. The term NGO, an abbreviation for non-governmental organization, was not in common use before 1945 and the establishment of the United Nations, although, for instance, the Red Cross started its activities already in 1863 (Kellow & Murphy-Gregory, 2018). NGOs are often clustered around intergovernmental organizations (IGO) such as the UN and the World Bank (Kellow & Murphy-Gregory, 2018). Despite not being mutually exclusive, NGOs are often functionally categorized into operational NGOs focused on the delivery of services, and those that are involved in advocacy and campaigning with the aim of affecting global policy (Davies, 2014). Lastly, I acknowledge the vast specialized literature on non-profits, NGOs, and their management, which is outside the scope of this dissertation. The focus in this dissertation is on the research conducted on organizations with a social mission from a management and organization literature perspective.

The distinction between various forms of social mission-driven organizations, NGOs, grassroots associations, social movements, and social enterprises, is not always clear. Their legal format varies along with country legislation, and generally, organizations choose between being registered as a non-profit or for-profit organization. However, many non-profits are adopting business practices to avoid being dependent on external funding (Dart, 2004; Minkoff & Powell, 2006), while many for-profits have a social mission at their core and a purpose far from profit maximization (Battilana et al., 2022). Non-profits are also encouraged to engage in innovation to be able to address the constantly changing social problems they are aiming to solve (Dover & Lawrence, 2012), and many of them aim to create social value through entrepreneurial strategies (Haugh, 2007). However, non-profit characteristics such as high reliance on volunteers, multiple stakeholders, and complex goals may influence these processes (Lawrence & Dover, 2015). Looking at the characteristics of various social enterprises
and ventures, it may be challenging to position them on the spectrum between pure non-profit to for-profit. In addition, their approach may vary over time, and as Ebrahim et al. (2014, p. 97) point out, “the ecosystem is still organized to support more traditional organizational forms,” which further complicates the matter.

### 2.3 Challenges in social mission-driven organizations

In the last decade, companies have increasingly pursued both social and financial goals, leading to a proliferation of social enterprises (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Battilana et al., 2022; Pache & Santos, 2013). Simultaneously, the field of non-profit organizations is adopting more business-like practices (Dart, 2004; Dees, 1998; Davies, 2014; Jones, 2007; Sanders & McClelland, 2014) in addition to the longstanding trend of professionalization and rationalization (Hwang & Powell, 2009). Consequently, non-profits and social enterprises are facing similar challenges resulting from the blending of seemingly incompatible strategies and missions, as well as adhering to a vast range of stakeholder expectations and goals. The traditional separation of non-profit and for-profit companies was challenged by the emergence of social enterprises, and in addition, many non-profits are now drawing inspiration from social enterprises. For instance, Litrico and Besharov (2019) studied how a Canadian non-profit engaged in social enterprise projects to achieve financial sustainability.

Ebrahim et al. (2014) outlined two major challenges facing organizations that pursue a social mission through commercial means: (1) balancing dual performance objectives and (2) being accountable to a vast range of stakeholders. According to Ebrahim et al. (2014), these challenges put the organization at risk of losing its hybrid nature as well as experiencing mission drift.

Several studies have engaged with these questions and shown that social mission-driven organizations often face tensions between the enactment of their social mission and stakeholder expectations and, in the case of social enterprises, the added pressure to create economic value (Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Jacobs et al., 2020; Smith & Besharov, 2019). For instance, in their study of a natural food cooperative, Ashforth & Reingen (2014) explored how tensions between idealist and pragmatist mission orientations were managed. Members did not accept the duality and generally identified with one of the two, which led to a conflict between members espousing the idealistic values of the natural food cooperative and members concerned about running a profitable business. Counterintuitively, the continuous power shift between the groups fostered functionality on the organizational level. Smith and Besharov (2019), on the
The other hand, showed how a social enterprise sustained a dual mission over time through structured flexibility, meaning the continuous interaction between stability and adaptation.

If organizations fail in the pursuit of sustaining their dual nature, some members can experience that the organization is not staying true to its mission. This can be particularly challenging if members are invested in or identified with the values they feel are not being realized (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). Grimes et al. (2019, p. 3) define mission drift as "a perceived discontinuity" which occurs when an organization's image and actions are perceived to be inconsistent. Similarly, mission drift has been described as reflecting "the core challenges of maintaining solvency and purpose" (Minkoff & Powell, 2006, p. 592). Although mission drift can occur in all forms of organizations pursuing multiple objectives (Battilana & Lee, 2014), it is especially salient in social enterprises or other organizational forms adopting a hybrid structure or dual purpose (Ramus & Vaccaro, 2017). Mission drift can, however, be mitigated. For instance, in their study of two microfinance banks, Battilana and Dorado (2010) showed how strong individual-level commitments to identity elements can lead to mission drift in a social venture. The study showed how the bank that was able to construct an identity balancing both social and commercial aspects achieved greater success. The balance was achieved by hiring people with weak prior commitments to either logic or a set of organizational identity elements. In another study, Ramus and Vaccaro (2017) highlighted stakeholder engagement and fit as important strategies for mitigating mission drift.

2.4 Member experiences in social mission-driven organizations: purpose and meaningfulness, identification, and dynamic uncertainty

People are often attracted to social mission-driven organizations because they align or identify with the perceived organizational purpose (Kouamé et al., 2022). Identification with the organizational purpose or mission is fertile ground for individuals to perceive their work as meaningful (Rosso et al., 2010). However, deeply meaningful work, especially when infused with ideological attachment or identification with the purpose, can result in highly negative reactions if individuals feel that the purpose or mission of the organization is being violated (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). This could happen for many reasons but is especially likely in contexts of dynamic uncertainty where the organizational environment, activities, and sometimes even personal circumstances are in constant change (Christianson & Barton, 2021). We could thus benefit from...
Theoretical premises

a more thorough understanding of how the relationship between organizations and their members develops under shifting circumstances. Next, I will provide an overview of the main concepts in this dissertation (see Figure 1.).

2.4.1 Purpose and meaningfulness

Meaningful work has been defined in a variety of ways. In this dissertation, I adhere to Pratt and Ashforth’s (2003, p. 311) definition of meaningful work as “work and/or its context are perceived by its practitioners to be, at minimum, purposeful and significant”. Another commonly used definition is one provided by Rosso et al. (2010, p. 95), who define meaningful work as "experienced as particularly significant and holding more positive meaning for individuals." Other elements, such as transcendence, have also been connected to meaningful work in addition to significance and purpose (Bunderson & Thompson, 2003).

Organizational members' perceptions of their work as meaningful is seen as important for the well-being of individuals and organizational outcomes. Studies on meaningfulness have been conducted from different perspectives, for instance, the role of leaders in creating a sense of meaningfulness for employees (Podolny et al., 2004; Carton, 2018), callings and meaningfulness (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), rituals and collective meaningfulness (Le-pisto, 2022) and meaningfulness and performance measurement (Beer et al., 2022) among others.

Compared to the highly noticed meaning and meaningfulness of work literature, less attention has been paid to the idea of organizational purpose. The
current paradigm shift from a profit to purpose orientation in organizations is also increasingly reflected in organizational and management research (Jasinenko & Steuber, 2022). There has been a lack of construct clarity around organizational purpose, which according to Jasinenko & Steuber (2022), is partly due to a failure to distinguish between the organizational level construct of "organizational purpose" and the individual level construct of "perceived organizational purpose." George et al. (2021, p. 3) suggest that organizational purpose can be understood as "an organizational objective defined and chosen by the firm itself." Organizational purpose is also often used interchangeably with mission. George et al. (2021) highlight Pearce and Davids (1987, p. 109) definition of mission as "the fundamental, unique purpose...[that] specifies the fundamental reason why an organization exists." These definitions do not imply any type of social mission or goal as an inherent part of purpose, but scholars generally agree that a purpose cannot be based on pure profit maximization (Gartenberg et al., 2019; Henderson & Vand den Steen, 2015) However, based on an extensive literature review, Jasinenko & Steuber (2022, p. 2) defined “perceived organizational purpose” as "the individual perception of an authentic organizational aspiration to contribute positively to society, which guides all organizational decisions and provides inspiration in daily operations". In this dissertation, the focus is on social purpose, social mission, and perceived purpose that all imply an understanding of the organization's role in providing better social outcomes.

Purpose and meaningfulness are often treated as conceptually similar (Rosso et al., 2010). In their review article, Jasinenko and Steuber (2022) establish the positive relation between the two but point out the conceptual distinction: organizational purpose is unrelated to the individual’s own position, while meaningfulness relates to an individual’s perception of the significance and value of their work. Thus, perceived organizational purpose and perceived meaningfulness do not always go hand in hand (Michelson et al., 2014). An employee might, for instance, perceive the organizational purpose as strong but feel that their own work is not contributing to the purpose and thus is meaningless. Purpose is an interesting overarching concept that connects the individual, the organization, and the society around them.

2.4.2 Identification

Identification is a highly relevant lens for understanding social mission-driven organizations. The role of organizational identity communicated through mission statements is highlighted in non-profits as it influences the organization’s
ability to attract donors and other valuable stakeholders such as volunteers (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2020). On the other hand, the potential of these stakeholders identifying with divergent values, often present in social enterprises, can present various challenges for the organization (Besharov, 2014). In addition, identification with an organization's mission or purpose is connected to experiences of meaningfulness (Rosso et al., 2010; Ashforth & Pratt, 2003). The more established literature on how identification evolves over time and as a response to societal shifts is also useful for developing the thinking around the very sparse literature on how perceived meaningfulness is connected to evolving societal contexts.

Organizational identification refers to a situation where a person's "self" is linked to an organization and is a process where “a given identity becomes self-defining” (Zietsma et al., 2019, p. 19). A person may then perceive their self-concept as containing the same attributes as the object of identification (Dutton et al., 1994). This means that if a person identifies with an organization’s identity attributes that are central, distinctive, and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985) about the organization, "provides at least a partial self-definition" (Petriglieri, 2015, p. 520). Dutton et al. (1994) gave the example of a salesman feeling more self-assured and being "somebody" as he started working for a well-known company as opposed to working for companies nobody knew. Consequently, this could mean that if an organization is criticized, the person feels a part of them is being criticized, which happened for example, during the Exxon Valdes oil spill (Dutton & Dukerich, 1994). Identification is often seen as a desirable type of attachment (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004, p. 2) and has been linked to positive outcomes like citizenship behavior (Dukerich et al., 2002) and commitment (Foreman & Whetten, 2002). On the other hand, researchers have acknowledged that overidentification can lead to problems like adopting unethical behavior on behalf of the organization (Dukerich et al., 1998) and overwork (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004).

In addition to identification, scholars also describe states of de-identification and ambivalent identification, which can occur when organizational members identify with parts of the organization but take distance from others. Ambivalent or partial identification can be especially salient in social enterprises as employees and other stakeholders may identify mainly with the organization’s social mission or business mission (Smith et al., 2017; Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Besharov, 2014). For instance, Ashforth and Reingen (2014) show how organizational members identified only with a chosen part of the organization's hybrid mission, which resulted in conflict between idealist and
pragmatist missions. Besharov (2014) shows how identification develops when members find different values to be important in an organization. In addition, the study highlights "the double-edged sword" of ideology.

There has been a growing interest in understanding how identification increases and decreases as “individuals and their contexts evolve” (Kreiner et al., 2006, p. 1032). The importance of this is supported by the idea of identification as episodic. Identification consists of episodes in which members of an organization consciously negotiate their identification in order to stabilize, build or transform their identity as a member of it (Ashforth et al., 2008).

Identification is an important concept that connects several dimensions relevant to social mission-driven organizations, such as tensions related to divergent understandings of organizational purpose or mission. In addition, identification is also often challenged as organizations adapt to novel or uncertain contexts.

As common in inductive studies, the research questions and theoretical framings have evolved throughout the data collection processes, which were longitudinal in all three of the studies. Each of the three essays benefitted from analysis through identity and identification lenses, helping me understand the evolving relationship between the organization and its members. Despite identity and identification eventually moving to the background, these concepts are highly relevant for understanding peoples’ experiences in social mission-driven organizations, as social missions are fertile ground for strong identification and strong emotional reactions.

### 2.4.3 Uncertainty as a context for organizing

Uncertainty is a pervasive feature of organizational life, and the related effects have gained interest, especially among strategy and entrepreneurship scholars (Andries et al., 2013; Kaplan, 2008; McMullen & Shephard, 2006). In these fields, uncertainty resolution and reduction are seen as important elements of entrepreneurial processes (Rindova & Courtney, 2020). In general, uncertainty is typically approached either as an objective characteristic of the environment (Townsend et al., 2018) or as a subjective perception (Milliken, 1987).

Organization theorists have devoted significant attention to subjective uncertainty, developing a range of conceptual approaches. Scholars drawing on economics often conceive uncertainty as an individual-level lack of required information about the present or the future (March 1994), which has been called 'epistemic uncertainty' (e.g., Fontana & Gerard, 2004; Rindova & Courtney, 2020). It defines uncertainty as a lack of information relative to an imagined
ideal of full knowledge and highlights the importance of collecting more information to mitigate uncertainty (March 1994; Packard & Clark, 2020). Psychologists, in contrast, tend to see uncertainty as a subjective phenomenon, something that individuals believe and essentially feel on an emotional level (Michel, 2007; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). This view conceptualizes uncertainty as dependent on feelings of doubt, beliefs concerning unpredictability, or the existence of multiple, incompatible predictions (Alimadadi et al., 2022; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). From this perspective, new information can either mitigate or add to uncertainty.

Given that uncertainty is often understood as the inability of individuals “to assign probabilities” to future events (Duncan, 1972), it emerges and evolves as subjects make sense of the world. Uncertainty is, in many ways, inherent to the sensemaking perspective. Sensemaking can be defined as “a process through which people work to understand issues or events that are novel, ambiguous, confusing, or in some other way may violate expectations.” (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 57) The classic view of sensemaking (e.g., Weick, 1988, 1995) suggests that individuals, teams, and organizations cope with present uncertainties through experimentation, taking actions, and interpreting the outcomes to direct subsequent actions. In other words, action taken as a response to surprising events becomes raw material for retrospective sensemaking and creates the reality that is made sense of. Weick (1988, p. 305) suggested people “think by acting” as well as warned that “there is a delicate trade-off between dangerous action which produces understanding and safe inaction which produces confusion”. This approach, however, has clear limits for actors who face dynamically uncertain contexts, defined by Christianson & Barton (2021, p. 532) as environments where “routines...and normal interactions are disrupted, and risk must be reassessed on an ongoing basis.” For the success of social mission-driven organizations it is imperative to find ways to address uncertainty.
3. Methodology

This dissertation is based on a qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Miles et al., 2014) and consists of three longitudinal studies based on interviews, observation, and archival data. In this methods section, I first describe the context of the studies. Two of the studies (Essays 1 and 2) examine social organizing in the context of the compound crisis taking place in Lebanon, while Essay 3 has its starting point in the refugee crisis affecting Europe in 2015. In addition, the section provides a methodological reflection related to the data collection, presents a summary of the different data sources, and elaborates on the analytical methods used in the studies.

3.1 The empirical context: refugee and compound crisis

Initially Essays 2 and 3 centered on the Syrian refugee crisis; however, as the research contexts evolved over time, this specific focus gradually receded into the background. During the first interviews for Essay 2, several of the aid workers were specifically addressing the refugee crisis, and a large part of the international funding was directed towards solving this crisis.

Lebanon has received many Syrian refugees since the beginning of 2012. By 2017, Lebanon had become the largest refugee host country in the world relative to its national population. With one million UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees, the ratio of refugees per Lebanese inhabitant is one to six (UNCHR, 2018). The refugee camps are informal, and refugees are scattered around the country, thus highly affecting the local population. This has caused an increasing strain on an already vulnerable state with reported detrimental effects on the Lebanese economy, politics, security levels, and social services (Cherri et al., 2016). The general sentiment in 2017 to 2019 was fatigue with the protracted crisis, which seemed to have reached a standstill. There were no solutions for refugees within the host country, as well as a slim chance for them to return home (UNHCR, 2018). In 2015, Finland also experienced some of the effects of
the refugee crisis when around 30 000 refugees entered Finland within a relatively short period of time. Several initiatives were started to help the incoming individuals, including some focusing on entrepreneurship as a tool for integrating refugees into Finnish society. Eventually, fewer people than expected arrived in the coming year, and many of the newly arrived did not stay in Finland. Thus, changing the landscape for organizations working with this target group.

Lebanon remained one of the largest refugee-hosting nations in the world in 2021, with one out of eight residents being a displaced individual, as only a small number of Syrians could return (UNHCR, 2021). Furthermore, a combination of crises, including extreme inflation and economic deterioration since mid-2019, the Covid-19 pandemic, and a massive explosion in the Beirut port in 2020, has created a complex compound crisis that affected all aspects of society (UN, 2022). Additionally, the population is grappling with electricity shortages and difficulties accessing clean water (UN, 2021). In the autumn of 2022, a cholera epidemic hit displaced persons living in settlements. The crisis in Lebanon has been unprecedented, and as a result, a large part of the population now lives in poverty, thus making it difficult for people and organizations to engage in their normal daily activities.

3.2 Research approach

This dissertation is based on qualitative research, which is often characterized as inductive and interpretative (Van Maanen, 1988). Such research commonly remains open for unanticipated events, and the research is often being designed while it is conducted (Gephart, 2014; Van Maanen, 1988). A flexible and open research design is useful in longitudinal projects. It would not have been possible, in 2017 and 2018, when I engaged in data collection for the first time, to imagine how events would unfold a couple of years later. The studies in this dissertation have started in an inductive manner but adopted more abductive characteristics as the research process progressed. The general approach could thus be described as data-driven and interpretative, drawing inspiration from grounded-theory methods.

The focus of interpretative research is on understanding and describing "the actual human interactions, meanings, and processes that constitute real-life organizational settings" (Gephart, 2004, p. 455). Grounded theory is a specific methodological approach to interpretative research that aims to "develop theories that address the interpretive realities of actors in social settings" through systematic data collection (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634). The method is
based on simultaneous collection and analysis of data, called "constant comparison" as well as theory-driven data collection. It is important to note that although grounded theory generally is defined as an inductive approach, its concept of constant comparison can be described as an abductive process -the type of reasoning that allows researchers to make "conceptual leaps" (Klag et al., 2013). Thus, one can say that abductive reasoning is built into the process of theory development in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory methods are described as consisting of “systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves.” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). The process of grounded theory research generally consists of steps such as identifying an initial research problem, conducting initial data collection and coding, several rounds of sorting memos, new data collection and focused coding, theoretical sampling that seeks specific data, redefining concepts and adopting categories as theoretical concepts, revisiting previous data, writing a first draft and possible collecting more data through theoretical sampling even after the first draft has been written (Charmaz, 2006).

3.3 Data collection

My choice of research contexts has followed Stake’s (2003) recommendation to choose a case that is of intrinsic interest to the researcher. All the research cases or contexts are connected by a lack of established modes of working combined with the desire to create social impact, which I find fascinating. The main sources of data for this dissertation consist altogether of 114 interviews, 80 instances of observation, and 743 pages of analyzed archival or textual material (detailed in Table 1 on the following page). The following section summarizes and reflects on the data collection process.
Table 1. Data summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Essay 1</th>
<th>Essay 2</th>
<th>Essay 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>2018-2020</td>
<td>2017-2023</td>
<td>2017-2022</td>
<td>2017-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>114 interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observation</strong></td>
<td>33 instances of observation (out of which 20 meetings resulting in 23 hours of meeting recordings)</td>
<td>11 days on the field</td>
<td>46 instances of observation (meetings, events, program days, day-to-day activities)</td>
<td>80 instances of observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Archival data</strong></td>
<td>222 pages</td>
<td>304 pages</td>
<td>217 pages</td>
<td>743 pages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we do interviews, we cannot assume to get facts about what happened, but the responses rather account of how the interviewee interpreted a specific situation (Brinkmann et al., 2015). Thus, the information we can get through interviews is a specific type of knowledge and must be treated as such. Interviews are suitable for specific types of research and research questions (e.g. when we want to understand how a person experienced or interpreted a situation) and the interviewee needs to be mindful of the limitations. According to Alvesson & Kärreman (2007, p. 1269), interview statements are not necessarily accounts of “authentic experiences” but might be “institutionalized standard talk about a specific theme.”

The interviews were semi-structured (Roulston, 2011) in all the studies, and the aim was to ask open-ended questions (Roulston, 2011) that would generate descriptive accounts of various experiences. My personal style of interviewing has developed over the years, but I tend to be conversational and focus on building trust with the respondent. This comes with advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, if the interview goes well, the informant gets reflective and provides long answers to questions. On the other hand, this approach has also, in some cases, prevented me from asking certain questions if the interview does not naturally flow in that direction. This was more often the case at the beginning of the study when interviews were explorative, and the interview guides less established. When the study progressed, the questions became more focused, and certain contextual background questions lost their significance.

For this dissertation, I conducted all the interviews in Essays 1 and 2 while the interviews in Essay 3 were conducted partly by me and partly by the
co-authors. When I joined the research team in 2018, some initial data collection for Essay 3 was already ongoing.

Although Essay 1 is focused on events starting in August 2019, I had started my data collection already earlier that year. The purpose of the research was to follow the team as they were planning and executing the event in 2020. Due to the multiple crisis situations, the event was canceled, and I thus had to rethink whether it would be possible to utilize the data I had already collected without the main event included. This is described in more detail in the analysis section in Essay 1. In this study, we relied primarily on observational data and meeting recordings. I participated in all but one of the team meetings and closely followed the team as they prepared for the event in 2020. I also observed internal planning meetings online and offline and participated in meetings with partners and collaborators. The observational data allowed us to analyze team-level dynamics taking place in day-to-day planning activities. Additionally, I had access to internal e-mail threads, Slack conversations, meeting memos, concept notes, presentation material, and other marketing material, which were analyzed to trace how the team adapted their planning efforts and communication with partners. I also conducted 13 semi-structured interviews lasting between 30 and 90 minutes with team members, using a theoretical sampling strategy. The interview data was recorded, anonymized, and transcribed for analysis.

The data collection for Essay 2 followed snowball sampling (Patton, 2017). Many of the connections I made during the first two data collection trips to Lebanon were very helpful in securing further interviews. Initially, I would seek to interview any aid worker who worked amidst the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. I soon realized that the experiences between local and international aid workers varied highly, and I thus chose to focus on local aid workers as they were personally affected by the ongoing crisis. Visiting refugee camps and observing volunteer training was highly beneficial for understanding the contextual reality of the aid workers. In addition, I collected reports from sources such as UNHCR about the ongoing situation.

The data collection for Essay 3 was conducted in three rounds from March 2017 to June 2017, March 2018 to January 2019, and May 2021 to June 2022. We collected three main sources of data: semi-structured interviews, field notes, and archival documents. The semi-structured interviews involved 54 participants, including founders, board members, core-team members, volunteers, and beneficiaries. In addition, observational accounts were useful for gaining a contextual understanding of day-to-day interactions between community members. The archival data included meeting memos, presentation material, event
material, executive summaries, and social media posts. This data was important for comparison with especially some of the retrospective interviews, constructing a timeline of events, and track changes in the organization’s aspirations and public identity claims over time.

### 3.4 Analysis

In Essay 1, we used an inductive theory-building approach to analyze the data collected, focusing on the events during economic and political instabilities from the fall of 2019 to April 2020. An important step in the analysis was producing a timeline of external events and analyzing internal team dynamics in relation to these events. We then engaged in initial open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which led us to focus specifically on discussions around uncertainty in the team meetings, fieldnotes, interviews, e-mail, and Slack conversations. Through additional theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014), we arrived at the four different strategies presented in the findings.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study in Essay 2, I collected and analyzed the data using an inductive iterative grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006). I used interviews, field notes from informal discussions and participant observation, and archival data as the primary sources of data. When resuming data collection after a pause during the beginning of Covid-19, I noticed a stark difference in how aid workers related to their work. Especially striking were the descriptions of some aid workers now personally being in a position of needing help, as well as the scarcity of resources and challenges to perform the work. I engaged in several rounds of coding, starting with descriptive first-order codes and eventually finalizing the process with a set of nine second-order codes and two aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013), resulting in the presented model.

As in all the other Essays, the process of analysis was also iterative (Locke, 2001) in Essay 3. We started by creating a timeline to establish a chronology of events. Secondly, we engaged in a systematic tracking of the organization’s social purpose claims. The chronology was important in analyzing how various identity or social purpose claims related to organizational events and interview statements. Simultaneously with this process, we coded interview transcripts to understand members’ perceptions of how Inclusion’s purpose evolved. The last step of the analysis involved building a grounded model based on the second-order categories and aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013) uncovered in the coding process.
3.5 A personal methodological reflection about doing fieldwork in Lebanon

In this section, I use two vignettes to provide a methodological reflection of my position as a researcher and my experiences from the field while doing research in Lebanon (Essays 1 and 2). Conducting fieldwork in an unfamiliar context, especially if one is immersed in participant observation, can be challenging at times. As Van Maanen (2011:220) describes it, fieldwork includes a great deal of blind wandering as well as misunderstandings and embarrassments. As a reflection of this, I want to share two vignettes, compiled based on video diaries and some written notes, that capture some of my own learnings and confusing moments during my first data collection trips.

Vignette 1 Immersive participant observation

My most immersive experience of participant observation was in August 2017 when I attended a training for volunteers in Beirut. It was a four-day training with a packed schedule of workshops. Although I found it extremely interesting, the experience was also exhausting at times, as described by the following excerpt of my personal notes during the training:

> Do not promise to be responsible for anything [in the program] if you want to do research at the same time. I’m very tired, my part was supposed to happen at 6 PM, but now it’s soon 8 PM and I’m still sitting here. (Fieldnotes, 2017-08-16)

As this was an intensive training, the days often lasted from 9 AM until late in the evening. Finding time to withdraw, reflect and write during the days was sometimes quite challenging as the following excerpt shows.

> Before dinner today, they were supposed to play some kind of game. As I don’t really like games, I thought this would be a good moment to withdraw to my hotel room, take some notes, write some e-mails, and come back later as I had no particular role in this game. It did not even cross my mind that anyone would pay attention to my presence as I wasn’t officially participating in the training. However, when I came back down the organizer of the game looked at me with what I interpreted as a slightly disappointed look and asked where I had been. I wonder if everyone knows what my role is here. Perhaps I have to communicate more clearly and explain I will not necessarily take part in every activity since I need a couple of hours per day to take notes. (Fieldnotes, 2017-08-017)
**Vignette 2: Spending a night in the Shatila refugee camp**

I was standing on the street waiting for my ride. Perhaps I appeared out of place, or maybe there was a slight worry on my face, as I stood there in the dark with my bag. Whatever the reason was, I was asked several times who I was waiting for and where I was going. After the first time I learned it was better not to tell. The first discussion went something like this:

Person: Hi, where are you going?
Me: to Shatila
Person: Shatila? Are you sure?
Me: Yes
Person: I don't think that’s a good idea, are you sure you know what you are doing and who is it that is taking you there?
Me: Thank you, but I know what I’m doing, and I’m going to Shatila.
(Fieldnotes, 2017-10-15)

I tried to sound confident, but the truth was that the genuine look of concern on the person’s face did make me worry. Questions started rushing through my mind. Did I know what I was doing? Could I trust the people there? My main concern was that I knew I had no way of finding my way out of the labyrinth-like camp alone. Later, I got to know the place and understood how to move around. Knowing a few people living there made it seem less threatening. I also understood that most people did not know much about the daily life in the camps and still associated the camps with the Shatila and Sabra massacre that took place in 1982. The following is a transcript from my video diary, recorded as I was just about to go bed in my room in the guesthouse:

It was a really good decision to come here. I was thinking I’ll write something but as soon as I sat down I realized I’ll probably fall asleep in a few seconds. I’m so exhausted....so exhausted...I feel at home and welcome here, I’m probably going to sleep better than I have in many nights. As soon as [the driver] picked me up, I realized I don’t have to worry about anything. I walked a few blocks with Yasmine, and she showed me a coffee shop, the woman there was really nice. I think everyone is used to [the organization] having guests, and no-one seemed to mind I’m here...I’m so tired that my words are becoming a bit unclear...goodnight. (Video diary, 2017-10-15)

During my first trips, rarely having the energy to write notes in the evening felt disappointing. I did not feel like a real researcher while lying in bed talking to my phone. The articles on qualitative research methods and fieldwork had given
me a different idea of what proper notetaking should be like. In hindsight, I am grateful to have all these video diaries. Some of them are difficult to watch, but they truly capture the reflections and emotions and especially the bewildered look in my eyes of having seen something (like the camps) for the first time. In some videos, my tense voice reflects the grief after hearing horrific stories. I could not have captured these things in words when experiencing them, but even after years of recording, they viscerally take me back to those exact moments.
4. Summaries of the essays

4.1 Essay 1: Coping with dynamic uncertainty: How reframing strategies facilitate collective sensemaking

In this study, Henri Schildt and I explore how a team copes with dynamic uncertainty while planning an event. Prior organization and management literature has elaborated on coping with uncertainty from various perspectives. For instance, studies have investigated cognitive frames during high uncertainty (Kaplan, 2008), management of cognitive uncertainty (Michel, 2007), and uncertainty regulation (Griffin & Grote, 2020). The sensemaking perspective has complemented these ideas by recognizing the impact of future-oriented sensemaking in reducing uncertainty. For example, Ganzin et al. (2020) observed how entrepreneurs can draw on spirituality to construct confident narratives of the future and thus overlook uncertainties that would challenge their plans. Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013), on the other hand, show how credible strategic plans and organizational action require connections between past, present, and future that create a sense of closure despite inherent uncertainties. Yet, we know little about how actors make sense of dynamic uncertainty, meaning contexts where a constantly evolving and unpredictable situation threatens to disrupt plans and ongoing courses of action (Christianson & Barton, 2021). In this study, we thus ask: What strategies can teams use to cope with dynamic uncertainty and facilitate sensemaking?

We adopted a qualitative theory-building approach to identify how team members reduce, deal with, or tame future uncertainties. We followed a Nordic-Lebanese social initiative, as the team sought to organize an event in Beirut to provide entrepreneurial education for women-led technology startups. The project was beset by an increasingly uncertain and unpredictable environment that frustrated their efforts. The analysis relies on meeting recordings and field notes collected through participant observation as well as interviews and archival data.
Our study provides two main contributions to the sensemaking literature. We begin by elaborating on how reframing strategies can facilitate sensemaking by shaping the temporal scope and premises of the situation in ways that make the present sensemaking situation less chaotic. To cope with dynamic uncertainty, we theorize, teams must actively engage in reframing, flexibly moving between different sensemaking strategies to cope with the shifting uncertainties that surface in the context of their plans and aspirations. We then provide a broader reconceptualization of the central but ambiguous concept of “sensemaking situation”. We note how temporality and uncertainty can be central characteristics of sensemaking situations and influence the extent of narrative closure in individual and shared understandings. Accordingly, the ability of actors to engage in collective sensemaking efforts depends on the balance between closure and chaos.

4.2 Essay 2: “When the helpers need help”: Finding meaningfulness at work in a compound crisis

In this study, I explore how aid workers find meaningfulness in their work amidst a compound crisis in Lebanon that often puts them in similarly precarious situations as the beneficiaries they aim to help. I build on the literatures on meaningfulness at work and meaningfulness during contextual shifts. Studies in these areas have highlighted how leaders can impact experiences of meaningfulness (Carton, 2018; Lysova et al., 2019; Rosso et al., 2010), the positive effects of meaningfulness (Wrzesniewski, 1997), and the potential dark side of meaningfulness (Oelberger, 2019). Although there is an established literature on meaningfulness at work, most studies have been conducted in relatively stable contexts, and thus we know less about how perceived meaningfulness may change as the context shifts (Jiang, 2021; Florian et al., 2019).

The empirical context of this study is set in Lebanon during the years 2017 to 2023. The inductive study examines how aid workers find and construct new sources of meaningfulness as day-to-day work becomes increasingly challenging due to an unfolding compound crisis in Lebanon. I specifically ask: How do aid workers sustain a sense of meaningfulness amidst a compound crisis?

The findings are based on an analysis of 50 interviews, observation, and archival data. The initial research question was centered around how aid workers cope in a protracted refugee crisis. However, due to the added financial crisis, pandemic, and large-scale explosion, the environment became significantly different and better described as a compound crisis. In the final analysis, my
main focus was on uncovering different sources of meaningfulness, as some aid workers had described questioning the value of their work.

The findings demonstrate the potential for a compound crisis to engender a crisis of meaningfulness as the contextual shifts disrupt sources of meaningfulness. Tangible sources of meaning may be lost due to resource scarcity, while relational sources are challenged by competing priorities, with aid workers themselves experiencing similar challenges as their beneficiaries. These challenges, in turn, threaten to cause burnout and demotivation among aid workers. However, some aid workers were observed to engage in "meaningfulness work" by which I mean the purposeful effort to restore a sense of meaningfulness in the face of adversity. The analysis revealed three specific strategies these aid workers employ: temporal reorientation towards the present, attention to relating in relational sources of meaningfulness, and emphasis on self-transcendent sources of meaningfulness. Taken together, these strategies facilitated the detachment from outcome-orientedness while enabling continued engagement in work, even when the capacity to aid beneficiaries was constrained.

The main contribution of this study is to the literature on the intersection between meaningfulness and shifting contexts. Whereas the few studies studying these topics have done so in a context where the employees are not heavily influenced by the shifts outside their work (Florian et al., 2019; Jiang, 2021), this study illustrates the dynamics of employees personally experiencing the same circumstances as their beneficiaries in which sources of meaningfulness can become sources of demotivation. The findings also contribute to the literature on meaningfulness (Rosso et al., 2010; Lysova et al., 2019) by introducing the concept of "meaningfulness work," which denotes the deliberate effort to restore meaningfulness.

4.3 Essay 3: In search for purpose: How members shape the formation and evolution of social purpose in nascent social ventures

In this Essay, we study the role of members in the formation process of a social purpose. Social purpose captures an organization’s aspiration to contribute positively to society (Jasinenko & Steuber, 2022; Hollensbe et al., 2014). Many nascent social ventures are dependent on volunteers and other external stakeholders as they seek to establish themselves. We know from prior literature that a compelling social purpose is highly supportive in enrolling stakeholders and other necessary support (Austin et al., 2006; Farny et al., 2019a; Kouamé
et al., 2022; Minkoff & Powell, 2006) as well as instilling a sense of meaningfulness and motivation for organizational members (Jasinenko & Steuber, 2022; Rosso et al., 2010).

While prior studies have noted the role of founders in formulating, promoting, and adapting social purpose (Cornelissen et al., 2021 & Grimes et al., 2019), research has largely overlooked how organizational members’ own interpretations and experiences can shape the formation and evolution of social purpose in nascent social ventures.

We used a qualitative inductive approach to do a longitudinal case study (2017-2022) to explore this question. The analysis revealed how members interpreted the initial purpose of the organization differently from the founders. These divergent priorities and understandings showed how members were committed to the initial purpose of addressing the refugee crisis, while the founders had a more fluid vision of what the organization was about. The different conceptions of purpose and ideas of how it could best be achieved led to a challenging time period in the organization, and some of the early members left. The founders and remaining members now sought to communicate a broader purpose, but although members were attracted to the organization, many of them felt confused about the purpose. Members understandings, enactment of activities, and communicated purpose ultimately converged when a new CEO as was starting to investigate the previous activities to see where they had achieved the most impact and then reorganized activities around a purpose that was clearly reflected in the achieved outcomes.

Based on the findings, we theorize two different tensions that influenced the formation and evolution of the social purpose (1) specificity tension and (2) enactment tension. The specificity tension describes leaders’ tendency to adhere to various stakeholder expectations, resulting in a broad purpose while members search for a specific purpose that translates into day-to-day activities. The enactment tension reflects the differing priorities of members and leaders. Members were interested in developing practices that reflected the beneficiaries’ actual needs, while leaders saw the purpose reflected in the publicly stated claims and expected members to develop practices that would reflect this purpose.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research question</td>
<td>What strategies can teams use to cope with dynamic uncertainty and facilitate sensemaking?</td>
<td>How do workers sustain a sense of meaningfulness amidst a compound crisis?</td>
<td>How do organizational members shape the formation and evolution of social purpose in a nascent social venture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main concepts</td>
<td>Uncertainty, sensemaking, and temporality</td>
<td>Compound crisis, meaningfulness</td>
<td>Social purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key findings</td>
<td>We identify four reframing strategies that helped the team mitigate and cope with the uncertainty: (1) freezing the future, (2) bracketing the future, (3) charting the future, and (4) abstracting the future.</td>
<td>The findings first show how uncertainty and lack of future outlooks as a result of a compound crisis can lead to a “crisis of meaningfulness” due to lack of resources and conflicting priorities. Secondly, the findings show how a partial sense of meaningfulness can be restored through “meaningfulness work”</td>
<td>The findings show how members’ construals of social purpose affected the evolution of a social ventures stated purpose and practices over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>The Essay contributes to the literature on sensemaking by elaborating on how reframing strategies can facilitate sensemaking under dynamic uncertainty by shaping the temporal scope and premises of the situation.</td>
<td>The Essay contributes to the meaningful work literature by explaining how societal-level shifts can influence the experienced sources of meaningfulness at work.</td>
<td>The Essay contributes to our understanding of organizational members’ role in the formation and evolution of social purpose in a nascent social organization by showing how tensions between members’ and founders’ construals shape the construction of purpose.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Discussion

This dissertation makes several contributions to the understanding of social mission-driven organizations in the field of management and organization studies. The introductory chapter synthesizes relevant literature on social mission-driven organizations and the distinct challenges they face. Essay 1 contributes to the literature on sensemaking by elaborating on how reframing strategies can facilitate sensemaking under dynamic uncertainty by shaping the temporal scope and premises of the situation. Essay 2 contributes to the meaningful work literature by explaining how societal-level shifts can influence the experienced sources of meaningfulness at work. Essay 3 contributes to our understanding of organizational members’ role in the formation and evolution of social purpose in a nascent social organization by showing how tensions between members’ and founders’ construals shape the construction of purpose. This dissertation advances our understanding of social mission-driven organizations by examining their specific challenges and dynamics of organizational membership.

The summaries of the essays in the previous section provide details of the contributions made by each essay. In this section, I discuss the broader takeaways from the dissertation as a whole, organized under three themes: embracing uncertainty in organizational life, the depth of meaningfulness and purpose, and what social mission-driven organizations can tell us about the future of work.
5.1 Embracing uncertainty in organizational life

Everything is very uncertain,
and that is what calms me.

- Tove Jansson

The quote is from Tove Jansson’s book Midwinter. The author of the famous Moomin books worked on many of her creative ideas during the Russian bombings of Helsinki (Karjalainen, 2014). Despite the horror, anxiety, and long periods of depression she often experienced, she seemed to have a curious and brave way of approaching life and embracing uncertainty. The descriptions of her in various biographies convey an absence of rigidness and a willingness to move with, not against, whatever the future brings.

All the essays in this dissertation are, albeit in different ways, connected to uncertainty. Essay 1 deals with the question of uncertainty directly and explores the different ways a team mitigates uncertainty and facilitates collective sensemaking by redefining the temporal scope and premises of the sensemaking situation. In Essay 2, aid workers constantly face uncertainty related to the societal context and aim to adapt as they face new challenges and find themselves personally in very precarious situations. In Essay 3, the contextual and experienced uncertainty is less radical and not included in the framing. However, the organizational founders and members did experience significant uncertainties. The organization was initially founded in response to an unprecedented refugee crisis, with tens of thousands of refugees entering Finland with no clear plan for how to integrate them into the economy and society. Later, the organization dealt with new uncertainties as more and more refugees were leaving Finland, as well as uncertainty related to the understanding of what the organization was about.

The essays contribute to our understanding of working under uncertainty in the following ways. Scholars have acknowledged both the positive and negative effects of uncertainty (Griffin & Grote, 2020). However, uncertainty has, in most studies been treated as an "event" to make sense of, as is the case in many studies from the sensemaking perspective. One-time crisis situations such as Weick’s (1988) study on the Mann Gulch fire provide a fascinating example of a high uncertainty context during which a wrong action may have fatal consequences. These disaster events, however, are concerned with fast, in-the-moment sensemaking. Another interesting example is the Stockwell shooting...
study conducted by Cornelissen et al. (2014), where uncertainty about an individual’s identity, the reading of cues around this person, and sensemaking in the group led the police to shoot an innocent person. However, we know less about people working under long-term dynamic uncertainty (Christianson & Barton, 2021) that is characterized by a chain of events (Roulet & Bhotello, 2022), for instance, a compound crisis or a society in a downward spiral.

Essays 1 and 2 contribute to our understanding of working with uncertainty in the type of circumstances described above. The first essay contributes to the literature on uncertainty and sensemaking by showing how a team can cope with uncertainty through four reframing strategies: (1) freezing the future, (2) bracketing the future, (3) charting the future, and (4) abstracting the future and how a team through these strategies redefine the temporal scope and the premises of the situation being made sense of. In these contexts, understandings and constructions of the future become highly important as the experience of uncertainty is oftentimes connected to the future (Duncan, 1972). The idea of prediction can, of course, be contested, as the future always is fundamentally uncertain. However, all activities of organizational life, such as planning, strategizing, or working towards a goal, rely on the assumption that today can tell us something about tomorrow. Without this assumption, chaos would be a dominant mode. There is a difference between planning on the basis of certain assumptions and rigidly holding on to expectations of certain outcomes. Essay 1 contributes to our understanding of these topics by showing how a team can flexibly use various strategies in order to avoid stagnation and paralysis.

5.2 Acknowledging the depth of meaningfulness and purpose

People’s search for purpose and meaningfulness in organizations is inherently connected to their search for purpose and meaningfulness in life. Pratt & Ashforth (2003, p. 312) defines meaningfulness at work as a response to the question "Why am I here." This question is not limited to a specific workplace but instead relates to a broader question about the nature of existence, as work is inherently intertwined with life. If people, as some scholars argue, see meaningful work as a fundamental human need (Yeoman, 2014), and increasingly seek answers to questions around purpose and meaningfulness through their work, it is natural that organizations are highly entangled in this pursuit. Thus, it is highly important that leaders take questions of meaningfulness seriously, and not confuse meaningfulness with questions related to motivation or general work well-being. Bailey and Madden (2017) suggest that it is the deeper aspects,
such as self-transcendence, that distinguish meaningfulness from other closely related concepts.

Literature on meaningfulness has traditionally put a strong emphasis on self-actualization as a source of meaningfulness (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). This is interesting from the perspective that Frankl, already in 1959, argued that self-actualization may be a side-product of self-transcendence. Viktor Frankl wrote in his book Man’s search for meaning:

The more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence. (Frankl, 1959, p. 109)

Bailey and Madden (2016) argue that meaningfulness at work is self-transcendent, episodic, and includes feelings of poignancy rather than general positive feelings. This is reflected in Essay 2 in several ways. The essay acknowledges the importance of self-transcendence as it has been documented by previous studies, but also contributes to our understanding of how self-transcendence can enable meaningful work even when successful outcomes are rare and thus the worth or value of the work is questioned by the aid workers. The findings in Essay 2 show how something that has originally been a source of meaningfulness in inherently meaningful work can, when lost, become a source of demotivation or even burnout, thus emphasizing the powerful effect of meaningfulness. Second, Essay 2 contributes to the understanding of how experienced meaningfulness can shift when aid workers adapt to the loss of outcome-related sources of meaningfulness through meaningfulness work.

Essay 3 makes several important contributions to the literature on organizational purpose. Importantly, it highlights how enactment tensions can lead to a crisis of purpose. Specifically, the study shows that divergent construals of social purpose held by organizational members and leaders can lead to a crisis of purpose, with the potential to prevent the organization from reaching its social goals. The study also contributes to the literature on purpose by demonstrating how purpose connects the organization and its members to external social issues and beneficiary groups, thus making purpose the nexus of connection between the organization and society. Organizational member connection to external issues they care about motivates them to try to influence the organization’s purpose and identity.
The study shows that members can actively replace leaders' claimed social purpose with their own construals when the related social problems have strong resonance or when the official claims of purpose lack resonance and credibility. This highlights the importance of meaningful engagement with beneficiaries and social issues in shaping members' construals of social purpose. While existing research has emphasized the role of leaders (George et al., 2021; Lucas & Park, 2023; Cornelissen et al., 2021; Grimes, 2018) in determining and shaping an organization's purpose, the study shows that members prioritize practices and their perceived impact over leaders' claims. This observation underscores the need for leaders to take into account the concerns and priorities of members in articulating and pursuing the organization's purpose. While Essay 3 primarily contributes directly to the organizational purpose, Essay 2 also has interesting implications for this perspective. For instance, aid workers in Essay 2 were challenged when they were unable to help beneficiaries, something that could be interpreted as a purpose of the organizations they worked for. This study could thus also be looked at from a purpose perspective — how aid workers deal with the situation when the purpose of their work is challenged. Essay 1 showed how reframing strategies facilitated collective sensemaking. In some cases, it is the abstraction of the perceived organizational purpose and the reconnection with a new purpose that allows the team to move forward in uncertain situations.

In sum, questions related to meaningfulness and purpose had significant impact on the organizational members. In both Essay 2 and 3, members finding purpose or meaningfulness at work, was vital for the continuation of activities sustaining the organizations they worked for.

5.3 What can social mission-driven organizations tell us about the future of work?

The study of social mission-driven organizations in turbulent contexts provides valuable insights into two more generic topics for understanding the future of work: developing a meaningful purpose and coping with disruptive uncertainty.

Social enterprises have established themselves in mainstream management and organization theory and can be seen as “a powerful means of developing novel solutions to pressing social problems” (Besharov 2022, p. 15). In addition, the difference between traditional NGOs, non-profits, and social enterprises is becoming more fluid. This is reflected in NGOs and non-profits adopting business-like practices, while there is increasing pressure on for-profit
organizations to adopt a purpose beyond profit-maximization (Battilana et al., 2022; Hollensbe et al. 2014)

This trend is also reflected in various research groups and course offerings at Aalto University School of Business. Paving the way for research focused on solving the social and environmental problems facing our society Aalto University has had an active sustainability research group for 30 years. More recently, the university launched a pilot program, where students can collaborate with NGOs and be involved in solving real-life problems. This reflects NGOs increasing interest in job candidates with a business background. In addition, students can take courses on, for instance, social innovation where they learn how various forms of organizations can create social value through innovative activities.

On an individual level, the increased interest in these topics reflects a genuine concern for the future, as well as a desire for meaningfulness and purpose. Many people search for more than “enriched” work (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017 p. 100) and want to be included in a purpose larger than themselves. When organizations and their leaders discuss meaningfulness, it is important not to reduce meaningfulness to an idea of general content or happiness. As Bailey & Madden (2016) argue, meaningfulness is more often connected to a sense of poignancy than joy. They explain how meaningfulness often is present in uncomfortable and emotionally challenging moments. These two points reflect how meaningfulness is a deeper and more complex experience than, for instance, feeling motivated or engaged at work. Uncertainty is only a threat to meaningfulness if meaningfulness is too tightly coupled with specific expected outcomes.

The risk of further global disruptions in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic warrants organizations to take future uncertainties in consideration. This dissertation suggests that we can, and perhaps should, understand uncertainty as a natural part of organizational life. In essence, this dissertation deals with contexts where people care highly about their work, despite significant uncertainties about whether they can reach the successful outcomes they strive for. A high level of caring combined with a high level of uncertainty are features that often are an inherent part of social mission-driven organizations. However, potential problems stemming from this combination can be mitigated by some of the strategies outlined in this dissertation. For instance, it is crucial that leaders of organizations with an attractive social mission, and thus likely to attract stakeholders that feel strongly about the espoused topic, make sure that organizational members feel they can enact the purpose in their day-to-day activities.
Second, dynamically uncertain contexts may require a situationally adapted way of understanding the future and flexibly moving between more fixed and fluid understandings to avoid uncertainty-induced paralysis. Last, in the most severe and challenging working environments, a detachment from future outcomes may be beneficial for engagement in the present. In the future, it is relevant for all organizations to become better at navigating uncertainty and finding a purpose that contributes to solving pressing societal and environmental issues.

In the end, organizations cannot manage disruptive societal events, but they develop and transform along them. The faster-paced society becomes, the greater the need is to swiftly adapt practices, and the more important it is for organizational members to find a sense of enduring meaningfulness that is not tied to structure or specific organizational activities. Disruptions may often have destructive effects, but these moments can also be seen as opportunities for new ways of organizing, as taken-for-granted structures may not seem so certain anymore. For instance, Battilana et al. (2022) remind us that shareholder value maximization "has not always been the taken-for-granted primary goal of companies. Rather, the perception of what goals a company should pursue has varied over time, based on the social context in which the company is embedded.” (Battilana et al., 2022, p. 237). If we combine this with Hollensbe et al. (2014, p. 1233) argument that there “is nothing predetermined about how the role of business in society will evolve in coming years and decades; it involves moral and social choice”, and take people’s craving for meaningfulness and purpose seriously, we may see much more creative and fluid organizational constellations in the future. This may be highly crucial in order to respond to uncertainties and disruptions that organizations and their members undoubtedly will face in the future.

5.4 Limitations of the study

There are several limitations to the studies, one of which applies to all three essays. In this type of qualitative research, findings are context-specific and may not be generalizable to other settings or populations. Other limitations apply to the individual studies, which I will address next.

Essay 1 provided important insights into a team's ability to cope with uncertainty. However, as the team did not work together daily, the observation and subsequent analysis was limited by my relatively limited interactions with the team. Accessing more team meetings could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play. Additionally, conducting interviews
throughout the process could have been beneficial to gain a deeper understanding of how the team members’ understandings shifted over time.

While Essay 2 provides valuable insights into the experiences of aid workers, it is limited by participant selection. I only interviewed aid workers who were currently working in the field and did not include those who had quit their job as aid workers. Interviewing aid workers who had left the field could have provided additional perspectives and important insights into the challenges aid workers face and possibly other aspects currently not visible in the findings. Additionally, fieldwork in an unfamiliar context posed its own limitations. I only included participants who spoke English in the study. Although most respondents were fluent, some expressed hesitancy in speaking English. This language barrier may have limited the ability to fully capture the nuances of the participants’ experiences. Finally, the study would have benefited from additional observation during the years past 2019. By expanding the timeframe of observational accounts, it is possible that I would have gained a better understanding of how the experiences of aid workers change over time.

Essay 3 provides valuable insights into how members may influence the formation and evolution of social purpose. The study is somewhat limited by the selection of participants, as in periods two and three we were not able to continue interviewing the individuals who decided to leave the organization. In addition, there may be limited applicability of the model to other contexts not possessing the same specific constellation of events.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

This dissertation, in combination with other recent literature, opens several interesting avenues for future research. First, future research could explore under which circumstances meaningfulness is a “double-edged sword” (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Rosso et al., 2010). While previous research has established that meaningful work can lead to positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction and commitment, the potential negative consequences of highly meaningful work have also received attention (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). By examining the external conditions under which employees feel the meaningfulness of their work is threatened, future research can help social mission-driven organizations avoid these potential drawbacks.

Second, a related area of inquiry is how organizations can balance visionary social narratives with employees’ need to see these claims reflected in present practices and outcomes. Organizations that articulate a strong social mission may face challenges in aligning their long-term vision with short-term
operational realities. Future research could examine how organizations can effectively communicate their social mission while still meeting employees' expectations for tangible progress and outcomes.

Third, as we face an increasingly unpredictable and volatile future, it is important to understand how organizations and people find their way forward when today seems to tell us little or nothing about tomorrow. Future research could explore how organizations navigate uncertainty, adapt to changing circumstances, and maintain their social mission over time. In addition, social mission-driven organizations often aim to create social change that extends beyond the present moment. However, little research has explored the temporal dimensions of social mission-driven organizations, including how they respond to changing social and political contexts in the present while aiming to build a better future.

Last, how organizations hoping to improve society find their purpose is a critical area of inquiry. Identifying and articulating a clear social mission is a foundational step for organizations hoping to drive social change. Future research could explore how organizations determine their social mission, taking into account different moral views and political ideologies suggested by Lucas & Park (2023), as well as the factors that influence the development of social missions beyond founder and organizational member influence. Research could also examine how social missions evolve over time as organizations adapt and respond to shifting societal contexts. In addition, the questions and findings posed in this dissertation may be highly relevant also in for-profit organizations as these organizations are facing increasing pressure to adopt a social purpose (George et al., 2021; Grimes et al., 2019)

5.6 Concluding remarks

The growing attention to social purpose and meaningfulness in organizations, combined with an increasingly uncertain societal context, brings new questions about organizational life to the surface. These developments require us to move beyond dualities in terms of organizational forms and expectations of success or failure. They call us to adopt a more fluid relationship to the temporal dimensions in our lives. As Hollensbe et al. (2014, p.1228) write “organizations are a part of society, not apart from society.” In essence, if the organizational social purpose can connect people to the societal issues they care about, and if chains of disruptive events are sites of substantial transformation, we want to ensure that future organizations honor the complexity of their societies and members. Furthermore, if organizations are to serve society, they ought to move along with
uncertainty and change instead of fighting against them, honoring the depth and transformative capacities of the people that build and mobilize organizations.

To conclude, I want to leave you with an image that captures the spirit of this dissertation. During one of my visits to the refugee camps, I got the opportunity to join a children’s art class. One girl was very focused on her drawing. At first look, it seemed like a normal landscape with a person walking among trees and flowers. Then I paid attention to the sky. It was filled with bombs and butterflies.
6. References


UN Lebanon (2022) UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, CCA Report
World Food Programme (2020) Beirut Port Explosion: Impact on Key Economic and Food Security Indicators