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The microstructures of rhetorical strategy in social entrepreneurship: Building legitimacy through heroes and villains

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ABSTRACT

For social entrepreneurs who seek to change existing community practices, the difficulties in building legitimacy may pose a challenge that compromises their ability to create sustainable institutional change. Case studies of 10 social enterprises reveal that rhetorical strategy aims to overcome this barrier. The findings suggest that the rhetorical strategy used by these enterprises casts the organization as protagonist and those that challenge the change as antagonists. The microstructures underlying this strategy include vocabulary sets that invoke socially accepted meta-narratives, and rhetorical devices that heighten the positive of the protagonist meta-narratives and the negative of the antagonist meta-narratives. The rhetorical strategy weaves together these protagonist and antagonist themes to create tension and persuade the audience of the organization's legitimacy.

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“Challenges? For sure. There's a lot of problems involved for anyone going green. Just with skepticism, hesitancy. You know, for me as an environmentalist, something like this is so obvious, but for many, it is still like pulling teeth.”
 – Enviro Fundraising, a fundraising organization selling environmentally friendly products

“I think the biggest challenge is that we're outsiders, and the education system is a very hierarchical, traditional system. So [the organization] is an outsider, so we're not being immediately embraced, on a systemic basis.”
 – Math Org, an educational organization focusing on a new way to reach those in the bottom of their class

1. Executive summary

Most research on social entrepreneurship with a change agenda has assumed unquestioning support for their social change goals, but recent work has shown that these organizations often face resistance from the broader community. We know very little about how these marginal organizations with limited resources overcome this barrier to successfully challenge the status quo. In the present research, I focus on how social enterprise builds the necessary legitimacy for social change, specifically looking at the rhetorical strategy used by these organizations and the microstructures that underlie this strategy.

Based on a case study of 10 social enterprises, the current study reveals that rhetorical strategy does aim to overcome this barrier. The findings suggest that the rhetorical strategy used by these enterprises casts the organization as protagonist and those that challenge the change as antagonists. The microstructures underlying this strategy include language that invokes socially-accepted, cultural meta-narratives, and rhetorical devices that heighten the positive of the protagonist meta-narratives

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and the negative of the antagonist meta-narratives. The rhetorical strategy thus weaves together the protagonist and antagonist themes to create tension, highlight the contrast between opposing actors and persuade audiences of the organization's legitimacy.

Consistent with prior work on rhetoric within institutional entrepreneurship, rhetorical strategy, and specifically the use of archetypal protagonist and antagonist characters, is found to be an important tool for changing perceptions and introducing new ideas. Within this context, it was found that the range of meta-narratives drawn on by these organizations goes beyond the typical understanding of social enterprise as a combination of business and charity. Sectors merged within these organizations, creating private sector social firms, and scientific charities and businesses, using the right approach with effective outcomes. In contrast, those impeding the social change were portrayed as antagonists, using the wrong approach, with ineffective outcomes. Similar to the entrepreneur in a new industry who wants to appear different, but not too much so (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994), these social enterprises drew on the legitimacy of the underlying meta-narratives as understandable and taken-for-granted, but created a unique framing by blending them to suit their own situation. And the negative antagonist creation emphasized the contradiction between the society's values and the status quo that, when woven together with the positive values within the protagonist theme, creates a tension that is solved by the proposed social change.

This study has implications for practice. Rhetorical strategy is not often included in organization capability development or strategic planning. In fact, in this study, enterprise leaders were not necessarily conscious of the language they employed or the cultural myths they drew on to create support for their organizations. This research indicates that rhetorical strategy should be addressed within the broader strategy of any organization involved in change and also developed as a core competency. Language represents an important and under-utilized tool that can be employed by social ventures who often have limited resources and power to persuade others. Further academic work in this area can help to elucidate the dynamics of legitimacy and social change, and the success factors of organizations whose very right to exist and operate is challenged by those interested in maintaining the status quo.

2. Introduction

Legitimacy comes from cultural alignment (Scott, 1995: 45) and is important in proving social value and accessing resources (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Oliver, 1991). It is the designation of an activity or entity as appropriate, as defined by a set of cultural norms (Scott, 1992). For social entrepreneurs that seek to change existing community practices, the difficulties in gaining legitimacy may pose a challenge that will compromise their ability to create social change. An important question then becomes, how does social entrepreneurship gain the necessary legitimacy for social change, when legitimacy is granted based on alignment with norms which the enterprise wants to change?

To answer this question, the present work draws on the concept of institutional entrepreneurship and a sub-set of research on rhetoric in order to analyze the strategies used by social entrepreneurs to build legitimacy. Although there are other types of organizations that fall under the label of social entrepreneurship, I focus specifically on organizations providing direct social service in order to transform systems that marginalize and exclude; these are often organizations that face severe resource constraints themselves and possess limited power (Mair and Marti, 2006; Martin and Osberg, 2007). In contrast with social enterprise, the work of institutional entrepreneurship is much broader. It includes any actor that attempts to construct or shape institutions by creating new systems of meaning (DiMaggio, 1988 in Garud et al., 2002). The work of institutional entrepreneurs has been studied within the accounting (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006) and publishing industries (Thornton, 2002), the public sector (Oakes et al., 1998) and government (Hardy and Maguire, 2010) as well as social movements, such as the HIV/AIDS advocacy field (Golant and Sillince, 2007). Recent work has begun to consider institutional entrepreneurship in the context of social entrepreneurship (Dacin et al., 2010; e.g. Mair and Marti, 2009).

Institutional entrepreneurship research has identified rhetoric as a key tool for gaining legitimacy and changing systems of practice (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Creed et al., 2002; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Communication has been shown to shape social reality (Boje et al., 2004; Marshak et al., 2000), validate an argument and build personal credibility (Watson, 1995). Research has examined the rhetorical strategies of powerful firms (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) and actors (Zilber, 2007) in for-profit sectors, and social movements led by scientists (Hardy and Maguire, 2009) as well as equal rights activists (Creed et al., 2002). Two recent studies have also analyzed the rhetoric of social entrepreneurship at the domain level (Hervieux et al., 2010; Nicholls, 2010) but it has yet to be applied at the organization level, with enterprises engaged in a variety of institutional fields that each has its own requirements and expectations.

Applying a rhetorical perspective to the question of how social enterprise with a change agenda can gain legitimacy provides a means of linking action to institutional change. It allows for a view of institutions as enabling and constraining forces, and of actors as possessing agency, while also acknowledging the complexity, uncertainty and contested nature of institutional (re)production (Creed et al., 2002; Garud et al., 2007). In this way, I build on institutional entrepreneurship research that emphasizes the role of language as a key tool for actor agency. I extend and complement existing work that has examined rhetoric in other contexts, and which has identified archetypal protagonist and antagonist characters as a key approach for building legitimacy (e.g. Creed et al., 2002; Golant and Sillince, 2007; Hartz and Steger, 2010). This strategy of characterization is particularly relevant, given the historic understanding of the social entrepreneur as hero (Dey and Steyaert, 2010). In this paper, I unpack the microstructures of this protagonist and antagonist creation as used by social enterprises attempting systemic change across a broad array of social issues.

Using a qualitative approach, the research specifically examines: *How do social enterprises with a change agenda characterize themselves and others in order to gain legitimacy with stakeholders? What microstructures are used to build this rhetorical strategy?* Based on case studies of 10 social enterprises from a variety of sectors, the findings reveal that the rhetorical strategy used by these enterprises does create the organization as protagonist and those that challenge the change as antagonists. The microstructures

underlying this strategy include vocabulary sets that invoke socially accepted cultural meta-narratives, and rhetorical devices that heighten the positive of the protagonist and the negative of the antagonist. The rhetorical strategy thus weaves together the protagonist and antagonist themes to create tension, highlight the contrast between opposing actors and persuade audiences of the organization's legitimacy.

3. Legitimacy, rhetoric and change

Building legitimacy is critical for new organizations. With legitimacy, stakeholders view an organization as more significant, predictable and reliable (Suchman, 1995). Active support will be required from customers and resource providers, such as venture capitalists or employees, and at a minimum, passive support is required from the community in which the firm resides and does business (Suchman, 1995). Because legitimacy is established within institutional logics (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005), extensive institutional work is typically required to build legitimacy for new ideas (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) and there is growing evidence that rhetorical strategy is an important part of this institutional work.

3.1. Building legitimacy through rhetoric

Rhetoric is persuasive language (Green, 2004). It has been identified as a key tool in building legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), dislodging dominant institutions and creating systemic change (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Effective institutional entrepreneurs are skilled at framing their vision (Battilana et al., 2009), and rhetoric is used to problematize the current situation, legitimize alternatives (Greenwood et al., 2002; Vaara et al., 2004), neutralize or polarize opinions (Meyer and Hollerer, 2010), and motivate others to participate (Creed et al., 2002; Green, 2004). Within organizations, Vaara and Monin (2010) found that rhetoric legitimized (and delegitimized) certain actions in a pharmaceutical merger, and Teram (2010) found that rhetoric was used in attempts to legitimize the claims of different parties during organizational change; at the institutional level, Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) found that rhetoric surrounding a contested change in organizational form contained institutional vocabularies from two different and opposing institutional logics.

3.1.1. Developing rhetorical strategy

Rhetorical strategy is "the deliberate use of persuasive language to legitimate or resist an innovation by constructing congruence or incongruence among attributes of the innovation, dominant institutional logics, and broader templates of institutional change" (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005: 41). Strategies such as translating (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Hardy and Maguire, 2009), drawing on meta-narratives (Czarniawska, 1997), and interpreting change to align interests (Whittle et al., 2010) are important for persuading others of the legitimacy of new activities. Rhetoric from other institutional fields (Phillips et al., 2004), and contradictions and ambiguity within the field (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) can be manipulated to show that a new practice is valid (Battilana et al., 2009). Creating local narratives (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Martens et al., 2007) with protagonists and antagonists (Creed et al., 2002; Golant and Sillince, 2007; Hardy and Maguire, 2010; Zilber, 2007) has also been found to create legitimacy for new concepts. Stories elucidate institutional logics, define failure and alternatives, and create images of heroes and villains (Morrill and Owen-Smith, 2002). At a practical level, potential allies are persuaded of the organization's legitimacy due to the positive representation of the protagonist's logic or 'frame', neutralization of the antagonist's logic (Creed et al., 2002), reduction of contradictions between the protagonist and allies, and amplification of contradictions among antagonists (Battilana et al., 2009). There is also persuasive power in the narrative style itself. Narrative appeal lies in the mirror narratives of the 'subject' and 'antisubject', creating dramatic tension (Greimas, 1987 in Cooren, 2001). Building on Cooren's work, Golant and Sillince (2007: 1153) found that the 'archetypal narrative frame' – the organization as protagonist on a quest, working against an antagonist or obstacle – was used to build legitimacy for an organization engaging with a controversial social issue. In this way, narratives legitimize certain perspectives, and "(p)articular things come to be portrayed as positive, beneficial, ethical, understandable, necessary or otherwise acceptable to the specific community in question. In contrast, other things are constructed as negative, harmful, intolerable, or, for example, morally reprehensible" (Vaara et al., 2006: 793–4).

Another rhetorical strategy identified in institutional entrepreneurship that deserves further elucidation is the use of meta-narratives. Actors weave, appropriate, resist and alter the meta-narratives of a culture to build legitimacy for their actions (Steyaert, 2007). Creed et al. (2002) identified several competing meta-narratives or 'master frames' in the debate for workplace discrimination policy, but found that both sides of the debate appropriated and reinterpreted the critical idea of civil rights. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005: 60) found that actors in favor of a new organizational form drew on a meta-narrative of "progressive rationality" through language that called upon ideas of efficiency and goal attainment, while those fighting against the new form drew on a meta-narrative of "moral tradition" with language that invoked values. Meta-narratives were used to legitimize (and delegitimize) practices that lay outside of the existing institutional logic. Oakes et al. (1998) found that the identity of a non-profit organization was changed through the use of new vocabularies relating to the external institutional logic of markets. Powerful organizational elite led these processes. Hardy and Maguire (2009: 149) found that when pressure came from outsiders, the focus was more likely to be on ethical concerns, whereas they noted that in previous studies on insider pressure, those in favor of change focused on economic benefits. In each of these debates the manipulation of language was important in building legitimacy for change.

3.1.2. Vocabularies, rhetorical devices and persuasive power

Rhetorical strategies are composed of vocabularies and rhetorical devices that drive the connotations and emotional power behind the rhetoric. The most basic unit of rhetoric is simply the words available for deployment. I use the term *vocabularies* to indicate the possible words available for use in a given context, and the term *vocabulary sets* to refer to specific groups of words commonly used together. Vocabulary sets often invoke widely understood concepts with connotations shaped by culture and history (Alvesson et al., 2008), and are the building blocks institutional actors can draw on to achieve their desired purpose (Creed et al., 2002; Watson, 1995). “Institutional vocabularies”, or the words used to represent specific institutional logics (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005: 60), have been found to invoke meta-narratives such as civil rights, business (Creed et al., 2002), ethics (Kornberger and Brown, 2007), rationality and science (Alvesson, 1993). These vocabulary sets and the rhetorical objects they draw on are available for use in an actor's rhetorical strategy.

Although less studied within the field of institutional entrepreneurship, *rhetorical devices* are used here to denote the language tools that configure the vocabulary for effect, used to carry out a rhetorical strategy. Metaphor (Vaara and Tienari, in press) and analogy (Battilana et al., 2009) are two common rhetorical devices important in change. One study, by Hartz and Steger (2010: 781), identified several rhetorical devices within the changing narratives on corporate governance, used to defend the designation of certain actors as heroes, helpers or villains. These included “scapegoating” or blaming, “downplaying” alternative narratives, “rationalizing” or providing reasons for the failure that do not challenge the dominant narrative, and “appealing” to actors to play their role in the given institutional structure.

Vocabulary sets and rhetorical devices are building blocks of rhetorical strategy, and in this way, are lenses that highlight or obscure perspective to increase persuasive power.

3.2. Social change and the need for legitimacy

Within the context of social enterprise with a change agenda, attaining the necessary legitimacy is profoundly challenging. Some view the emergence of social entrepreneurship as a result of the de-legitimation of charity in the current neo-conservative climate, and the increasing role of business and entrepreneurship in all aspects of life (Dart, 2004). A few recent papers have used a rhetorical perspective to analyze the legitimation strategy employed by those aiming to build the new domain of social entrepreneurship. Nicholls (2010) found two competing narrative logics: the hero entrepreneur and the community; and two competing ideal-type organizational models: business-like and advocacy/social change. Dominant actors within the field were pushing the business-like hero entrepreneur model at the expense of advocacy and social change. Hervieux et al. (2010) analyzed how those in the field of social entrepreneurship rhetorically legitimized joining business and social purpose, and managed the tension between the civic and market logics. Like Nicholls, they found that rhetoric is legitimizing one type of social entrepreneurship, putting the field at risk of isomorphism and homogenization (Nicholls, 2010; Sud et al., 2009). But Hervieux et al. (2010) note that other logics may be present at the micro-level, and that research is needed into the rhetoric used by enterprises to gain legitimacy within their specific fields.

Because of their change agenda, social enterprises typically face institutional resistance and must fight for legitimacy (Alvord et al., in press; Mair and Marti, 2009; Nicholls, in press; Sharir and Lerner, 2006). For example, Grameen Bank is an organization that provides credit to the rural poor in Bangladesh using micro-loans secured by social collateral; they had to overcome resistance from the highly regulated banking industry and skepticism from potential funders that the poor were a good credit risk, ideas that went against existing economic and development theory (Yunus, 1999). BRAC is a nonprofit organization that works holistically to alleviate poverty through social enterprise and a variety of other programs. They, and the women who participated in their employment initiative, faced threats and assault from the community because they violated local religious norms (Mair and Marti, 2009). Sekem, an organization that pioneered biodynamic agriculture in Egypt, created an industry amidst a vacuum of information about the benefits of organic farming (Wheeler et al., 2005), fighting the army when they occupied the land, and persuading hostile rural farmers to participate (Seelos and Mair, 2007). Gaining participation and active support from a wide range of stakeholders is fundamental for these ventures (Harman, 2008). The trust of the general public is a crucial asset for social enterprise, important in enabling them to deliver on their social change goals (Desa and Kotha, 2006; Nicholls, in press). While Sharir and Lerner (2006: 9) identified “acceptance of the idea of the venture in the public discourse” as one of eight factors critical to social enterprise success, we do not have an understanding of how these enterprises gain support if the social change is not already widely accepted. One case study by Mair and Marti (2009: 421) begins to address this issue. They found that “ideational bricolage” was used to appropriate and expand on an accepted institutional logic of helping the poor in order to detach women's employment from religious restrictions and re-connect it with ideas of charity, thereby reducing community resistance and building support. Thus, this work indicates that rhetoric, in the form of ideational bricolage, can be manipulated to build support for new and contentious change initiatives.

Building on the work of Mair and Marti (2009) at the organizational level, and Nicholls (2010) and Hervieux et al. (2010) at the domain level, I examine the role of rhetoric in building legitimacy for social enterprise across a wide range of sectors, identifying the microstructures of legitimation within this context of social change and resistance.

4. Methodology

This paper presents the results of a multiple case study of 10 social enterprises. Qualitative methods allow for analysis of the meaning and codes that underpin language and stories, making it an ideal system for rhetorical analysis (Prasad, 2005). Case

studies have often been used within the fields of institutional entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship to develop theory about the process of social change (e.g. Golant and Sillince, 2007; Hardy and Maguire, 2009; Mair and Marti, 2009) because these methods allow greater understanding of the complex social processes involved (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Single case studies of specific organizations (e.g. Desa and Kotha, 2006; Golant and Sillince, 2007; Maguire and Hardy, 2006) or specific institutional events (e.g. Creed et al., 2002; Hardy and Maguire, 2010; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) have provided 'revelatory' cases (Yin, 1994) leading to initial insights into the underlying theory. Multiple case studies provide less detail, but are often a stronger foundation for furthering this theory development (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Variation in the cases allows for replication, theory extension, elimination of alternative explanations (Yin, 1994) and increase the robustness of findings (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). When patterns are identified among multiple, varied cases, there is less risk that results are idiosyncratic and greater assurance that observed findings are due to common attributes (in the present case, the organizations' shared identities as social enterprises and their goals of systemic transformation). Thus, the present study uses a qualitative multiple case study methodology to extend current theory (Siggelkow, 2007), further unpacking the rhetorical strategies used to build legitimacy within the context of social entrepreneurship.

4.1. Sample and data

Theoretical sampling was used to select 10 social enterprises based on two key criteria: (1) the organization indicated social transformation intrinsic to the mission; and (2) they varied in characteristics such as sector, age, geographic scope and profit structure to build variation into the theory. While these organizations cannot be viewed as representative of the entire population, they do represent a variety of types of social enterprise, chosen for their theoretical relevance (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The organizations were all based in Toronto, allowing for greater access and almost all face-to-face interviews. See Table 1 for an overview of the organizations, their transformational goals, and the communities they are working in and trying to change.

Two organizations were first selected, and interviews were conducted with the leaders. Preliminary analysis indicated that the interviews gathered appropriate rhetoric to answer the research questions and archival data supported the rhetoric found in the interviews. Eight more organizations were then selected. Organization leaders were seen as ideal spokespersons for the organizations. For case studies of larger organizations, it is common to interview multiple members of the top management team (e.g. Eisenhardt, 1989b), but given the small size of these organizations (total number of employees ranged from one to six) and that each is closely identified with its leader, limiting interviews to the leaders alone seemed appropriate. The in-depth interviews with leaders were semi-structured, using grand tour questions and generic prompts (McCracken, 1988) (see Appendix A for the interview guide). Participants were not asked directly about their rhetorical strategy, but were asked questions about organizational strategy and activities; leaders were encouraged to introduce issues they felt were relevant. Interviews lasted 40–100 min (ave. 60 min), creating 169 single-spaced pages of text.

Nine stakeholders from three of the organizations were then interviewed to assess the effects of the rhetorical strategy (see Appendix B.1. for a list of interview participants). Interviews lasted 25–70 min (ave. 40 min), creating an additional 96 single-spaced pages of text. Issues of access prevented inclusion of more stakeholders, and thus, one limitation of the current study is the relatively small sample of stakeholders involved, none of whom represent the antagonist perspective. Most stakeholders were closely aligned with the organizations, but a few were relatively impartial and representative of the broader fields. Information gathered from these participants provides only preliminary, tentative insights into the impact of the rhetorical strategies on organizational legitimacy.

Interviews were supplemented with multiple types of archival data, including organizational text from websites, podcasts, blogs, newsletters, pamphlets, reports and public documents (see Appendix B.2. for archival data sources from each organization). Websites, blogs, reports and other written texts were converted to Word documents, creating 971 single-spaced pages of text, as well as additional verbal texts, such as videos and podcasts. These texts were rigorously examined for the categories and themes identified in the interviews and for those that had not emerged in the interviews. Attention was also given to similarities in the rhetoric deployed between text genres and between organizations.

In total, the data represented texts created for a variety of audiences, from private grant proposals and confidential interviews (with the researcher) to widely available public texts, such as websites and blogs. Organizational texts were not taken as fact, but viewed as strategies for persuasion that drew on cultural discourses, both consciously and unconsciously, in order to shape reality (Alvesson, 2003). Interviews and archival data were used as examples and proxies for overall organizational rhetoric. Interviews allow for more emergent rhetoric, probing of issues and analysis of real-time texts. Archival data, such as websites and pamphlets, provide examples of more polished rhetoric intended for many audiences. Combining these sources allows for triangulation between data sources, increasing the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and of the emerging theory (Eisenhardt, 1989a).

4.2. Coding process

Analysis of the interview transcripts and archival data took place in three stages, following recommendations for theory building from case studies by Eisenhardt (1989a). First, I conducted a within case analysis, looking for the *a priori* constructs developed from the literature as well as any emergent concepts (Steyaert, 2007; e.g. Dutta and Thornhill, 2008; Karlsson and Honig, 2009). Second, I conducted cross-case analysis to identify patterns. Finally, I determined core themes by analyzing texts for

Table 1
Organization overview.

Organization	Parameters ^a				Organization goals and their communities
	Age (years)	Size (FTEs/\$)	Profit structure	Geographic scope	
Math Org	10	6/Small	Nonprofit with some earned income	Provincial	Math education program that sells workbooks and provides teacher education for grades 1 to 8. <i>Transformational goal:</i> implement an alternative model of (math) learning throughout the education system that will increase math literacy and reduce anxiety. <i>Community:</i> Broad education system, including teachers, boards, students, and other community education programs working with the schools.
Mental Illness Org	26	1.5/Small	Nonprofit	International	Provides training for national family support groups and educates healthcare systems about the importance of family. <i>Transformational goal:</i> change attitudes towards families of people with mental illness and create support infrastructure. <i>Community:</i> families of people with severe mental illness, national and local family support organizations, nurses and psychiatrists, other mental health organizations around the world
Restaurant	10	5/Medium	For-profit owned by charity	Local	Upscale restaurant that trains and employing street youth to work in the restaurant as chefs, wait staff and managers. <i>Transformational goal:</i> youth social services that operate on a corporate model, preparing youth for the 'real world'. <i>Community:</i> street youth, social service agencies, other restaurants, and the local dining public.
Property Management	23	1/Medium	For-profit that also operates a charity	Local	Retail outlet owned by a local worker cooperative, cooperative venture capital group, private developer, merchant bank and non-profit funding organization. <i>Transformational goal:</i> economic system based on community, fair trade and sustainable development. <i>Community:</i> local businesses and the community.
Enviro Fundraising	1	4/Small	For-profit	North America	Alternative fundraising program for schools, sports groups, churches and community organizations. <i>Transformational goal:</i> environmentally responsible producers and consumers. <i>Community:</i> schools and community groups, children and parents as consumers, suppliers.
Green Investment	3	1/Medium	For-profit	(undefined)	Private venture fund, supporting early stage green energy. Its primary investment is an experimental green hotel in downtown Toronto. <i>Transformational goal:</i> Sustainable energy system. <i>Community:</i> energy developers, other funders, governments and the world.
Social Education	4	1/Small	For-profit	North America	Operates a resiliency learning game for schools/communities that increases self-awareness and teaches the value of diversity. <i>Transformational goal:</i> social and emotional education for everyone. <i>Community:</i> education system, including teachers, principals, students, boards, and other community groups involved in emotional support, socio-emotional learning and research.
CSR Magazine	7	6/Medium	For-profit	National	Corporate social responsibility magazine for consumers. <i>Transformational goal:</i> to create a more caring capitalism. <i>Community:</i> consumers and corporations, social purpose organizations.
Electricity Financing	3	2/Medium	Nonprofit co-op	Provincial	Financing organization that finances early stage, community-owned sustainable energy projects. <i>Transformational goal:</i> a sustainable energy system that is also connected to local communities. <i>Community:</i> rural communities, the energy system, government.
Enviro Start-ups	13	1/Small	For-profit launching nonprofits & for-profits	(undefined)	Launches, incubates and spins off new ventures, focusing on green energy and social media. <i>Transformational goal:</i> environmental and social change through new start-up business model. <i>Community:</i> entrepreneurs and their communities, environmental and social media experts/developers.

^a At the time of interview.

both the most common rhetorical strategies and those that were most conceptually powerful in providing understanding (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). I reviewed the texts to see how themes were developed similarly and differently by the organizations. The process was iterative, between cases and relevant literature, as it moved to higher levels of abstraction (Eisenhardt, 1989a; e.g. Henderson et al., 2006; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Steps were repeated as necessary, focusing on different themes, on each organization individually, and grouping the organizations based on different variables in order to change the perspective. "Unifying concepts" (Creed et al., 2002: 482) were important in connecting codes to higher level categories, and categories to over-arching themes that related to coherent legitimacy-building strategies. Similar to Suddaby and Greenwood

(2005), the analysis aimed to capture the range of the rhetorical arguments used. Ultimately, passages including protagonist and antagonist development were isolated and analyzed within and between organizations for the microstructures underlying this rhetorical strategy.

Data sources were triangulated and initial concepts were presented back to the interviewees as a means of verifying the emerging framework. Interestingly, while the interviews and archival data were similar in portrayal of the protagonist, the archival data generally did not create an antagonist. This may indicate an inconsistency in the rhetoric that decreases the validity of the interviews, but is more likely due to the permanence and broad reach of the written texts. Leaders are likely to be more careful about when and to which audience an antagonist is portrayed. One online video with the Math Org founder did create an antagonist, acknowledged by the Executive Director to cause tension with stakeholders, and providing support for the sensitivity to antagonist-creation in more permanent, wide-reaching genres. Each of the protagonist meta-narratives, their underlying vocabulary sets and protagonist portions of the rhetorical devices were present in both the interview and archival data for all of the organizations. Websites were relatively well-rounded presentations of the organization and included reference to all of the organization's protagonist meta-narratives. Other sources, such as newsletters or pamphlets were much narrower in topic, and often only presented part of the protagonist theme.

5. Microstructures of rhetorical strategy

A number of patterns emerged from the data, clustered around two main rhetorical practices that were juxtaposed throughout the texts, the protagonist and the antagonist. In brief, the organizations used *vocabulary sets* that invoked socially accepted *meta-narratives*, and *rhetorical devices* that emphasized the positive and the negative; the meta-narratives were combined into protagonist and antagonist themes that they then contrasted to create their *rhetorical strategy*. Specifically, (1) vocabulary sets were used to tap into five meta-narratives (charity, grassroots social movement, science, business and entrepreneurship) that were combined to describe the protagonist; and three meta-narratives that were then combined to describe the antagonist (economic, ideology and bureaucracy); (2) four main rhetorical devices were used to emphasize the positive of the protagonist meta-narratives in contrast with the negative of the antagonist meta-narratives (contrastive typecasting, theorizing and problematizing, alignment, and evaluative statements); (3) positive meta-narratives were combined to create the organization as protagonist and negative meta-narratives were used to create those that challenged the change as antagonists; and (4) protagonist and antagonist themes were woven together into a rhetorical strategy. Each of these findings will be elaborated on in the sub-sections below, presented with select examples from the cases.

5.1. Using vocabulary sets to draw on meta-narratives

5.1.1. Meta-narratives of the protagonist

Specific vocabulary sets were used to tap into five recognizable meta-narratives (see Table 2) from three sectors: the social sector, science and technology, and the business sector.

While there was evidence of the “hero entrepreneur”, community, business, and advocacy/social change concepts (Nicholls, 2010), there were also additional unexpected meta-narratives within the organizations' rhetoric. The meta-narratives are presented in the first column of the table, and the vocabulary sets used to invoke them in the second. Representative examples from the data are presented in the final column. Six of the ten organizations drew on the positive meta-narrative *charity* (row 2 of Table 2) to legitimize their organization and activities. While the literal definition of a charity defines the non-profit-distributing tax status of the organization, there is also a broader definition that relates to the associated concept of a charity as a social identity (Upham, 2006). The vocabulary set used in the texts included language such as, products chosen based on “health or safety or reusability” (Enviro Fundraising) that “makes a difference”, “fostering positive social change” (Social Education). Organizations made decisions based on the “charity part of our mission” and “vision” (Math Org) and “employ an at-risk community” in order to “change the world” (Restaurant).

Six organizations made reference to a *grassroots social movement* meta-narrative (row 3 of Table 2). Social movements have a long history, and are understood as the mobilization of people in response to [social or environmental] injustice (Larana et al., 1994) that often emerge as a grassroots form of political engagement (Uphoff, 1993). The grassroots social movement vocabulary set identified here is similar to, but broader than, the “communitarian narrative style” found in Morrill and Owen-Smith's (2002: 106) research on environmental litigation, which emphasized community autonomy and local knowledge. It includes language such as: “to educate the young people” and have a “ripple effect” (Enviro Fundraising), being “responsive”, working “in the community” as a “social movement” (Math Org), through “advocacy work” “to gather up everybody together”; and somehow, “it grows from there”, as “a cascade” because “people could see what could be done” (Mental Illness Org). While this meta-narrative could be argued to include two constructs, the grassroots and social movement concepts were so routinely intertwined within the texts that it appears they operate as a single motif.

Four organizations relied on a *science* meta-narrative (row 4 of Table 2). Science is a way of learning about the world and making sense of reality, separate from religion and “pseudo-science” (Pickering, 1992: 19–20 in Taylor, 1996), and is currently granted authority over truth in Western culture (Burton, 2004; Thomas, 2003). The science meta-narrative is similar to the “technocratic narrative style” found in Morrill and Owen-Smith's (2002: 106) study and the “Enlightenment” meta-narrative found in Zilber's (2007: 1047) research on the dot com crash. The vocabulary set includes language such as, “research teams” that

Table 2

Protagonist themes: vocabulary sets and meta-narratives.

Meta-narratives	Vocabulary sets	Examples
<i>Charity</i> : Pro-social (Upham, 2006) and based on helping people in need (Perrin, 1985); a concept infused with values (Vinten, 1994).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profit • Social/environmental goals and benefit • Mission and values-based 	<p>“people are quite awed that we're selling books in the school system market. But we're a registered charity, and we're not really in the book-selling market – that's all really, it's just a vehicle, a tool for us, to improve tools for kids & teachers. It's really a whole different philosophy.” and “because as a charity, part of our mission, and [the founder's] vision, is to reach struggling students in the bottom third of the class.” (Math Org)</p> <p>“...that spiritual impetus about recognizing that this tool, really, qualitatively makes a difference in the lives of people who use it...” (Social Education)</p>
<i>Grassroots Social Movement</i> : Community-based, participative, & “bottom-up development” (Uphoff, 1993: 608); mobilizing people in response to [social or environmental] injustice, based on a system of ideas & commitment of people (Larana et al., 1994).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottom-up, • Responsive and emergent • Participative and local • Motivational • Educational • Constructing what's possible 	<p>“it sort of grew...He kinda got hooked up with their neighborhood school and teachers started to ask him into the classroom.” and “We didn't set out to sell books in classrooms. So basically, we ended up doing that more from – [the founder] never set out to do this, but he just kept being responsive to the demand out there.” (Math Org)</p> <p>“there's that quotation, ‘a small group of people can do...can change the world...’” and “actually, everybody has to be wound up. We're about being motivated...” (Mental Illness Org)</p>
<i>Science</i> : Pursuing the unknown, following systematic protocol & established criteria (Appadurai, 2000), based on rational inquiry, neutrality, understanding means-ends relationships that obscure uncertainty & create what is considered knowledge (Alvesson, 1993).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific or medical model • Evidence-based, facts • Testing and research • Experts 	<p>“within reason, our methodology has not changed that much. We've added indicators, we see what doesn't weigh much, we take things out...” and “I do think that people can see that there's a lot of research. Like, we're basically trying to be credible – we're not trying to be credible, we are credible. We're showing that up front.” (CSR Magazine)</p>
<i>Business</i> : Operating based on a logic of organization, efficiency, competitive advantage, strategy & marketing (Thomas, 2003).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy • Management • Marketing, selling and branding • Financial decisions, cost–benefit analysis • Core competencies • Economic model 	<p>“I sell it to the Bay Street crowd, right?...well, it's a very simple relationship: create a job, kid gets a job, kid has success, they have money in their pocket, and then they move on. Right?” and “we just moved to a very sort of corporate model, which is more like job coaching,” (Restaurant)</p> <p>“The vast majority of [my investment] is energy efficiency, mainly because that is the biggest bang for the buck, in terms of carbon remediation...Renewable energy will not be a focus, mainly because I have yet to see coherent, long-lasting action in carbon-pricing.” (Green Investment)</p>
<i>Entrepreneurship</i> : Involving unique individuals who create value (Gartner, 1990) by engaging in “the discovery and exploitation of profitable opportunities” (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000: 217).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities • Risk • Creativity and creation • Passion, dedication and importance of the people • Early stage • Spin-offs 	<p>“It's a crazy dance of someone who doesn't really know exactly what they're doing, but they're trying to figure something out.” and “they'd run into some specific obstacles and then try and create a solution...strategic in the sense of, we're living this, we're trying stuff, we're doing practical things and when we run into the same barriers and problems again, then, create something new to go address those things, while we keep trying.” (Enviro Start-ups)</p> <p>“well, just seeing something that makes sense, from a social sense, and also from an economic sense. You're not quite sure, but you know you try to create a window in there and you can try something ...there's always some risk, but you sort of believe in the people.” (Property Management)</p>

used “data”, “numbers”, “indicators” and “methodology” (CSR Magazine), “testing and refining” and “working towards a theory” through “rigorous analysis” (Social Education).

Four of the ten organizations drew on a *business* meta-narrative to create legitimacy (row 5 of Table 2). Business is viewed as a widely legitimate activity unless otherwise specified (Suchman, 1995) with an expanding role in society (Dart, 2004). The business vocabulary set involved language such as: to “compete with retail prices”, operating as a “for-profit” and “marketing on a small budget” (Enviro Fundraising), making sure they “sell to the right marketplace” while “creating a really good product” (Restaurant), looking for “the biggest bang for the buck” and “managing the investment” with “economic scrutiny” (Green Investment).

The final meta-narrative, *entrepreneurship*, was also drawn on by four organizations (row 6 of Table 2). Entrepreneurship holds legitimacy because of our societal belief in its contribution to community wealth and ability to create new ideas (Alvarez and Busenitz, 2001). The vocabulary set includes language such as, “take risks”, “holding onto the belief” in order to “keep your core product growing and innovative” (CSR Magazine). The organizations are “instinct-driven”, “relentless”, “communal, peer produced, high degree of trust and is worth nothing until we get it to a valuation” (Enviro Start-ups); “early stage enterprise” with “really great opportunity” and “growth potential”, using only “creativity” and “sweat equity” (Social Education).

5.1.2. Meta-narratives of the antagonist

As evidenced above, each organization drew on specific meta-narratives to describe the organization as protagonist. They also created an 'other' or antagonist in the interview texts, based on different underlying meta-narratives. In the interviews specific vocabulary sets were used to tap into three meta-narratives (see Table 3). The first column of the table presents a description of the meta-narratives. The second column presents the vocabulary sets used to invoke the meta-narrative and the final column presents examples of each meta-narrative from the texts. Each organization drew on one or two of the three meta-narratives to create an antagonist theme. Antagonists included the government or public sector, the public in general or specific groups who impeded social progress.

The *economic* meta-narrative (row 2 of Table 3) was invoked by three organizations through a vocabulary set that focused on "senior managers" allowing "billions to be pillaged" (Social Education), a "myth" of "entrepreneurs...motivated by the pot of gold", a government that has always prioritized "economic concerns" (Green Investment), and social services that are "privately owned" and "doing very well off it" (Mental Illness Org).

The vocabulary set used by four organizations to reference the *ideology* meta-narrative (row 3 of Table 3) included: beliefs based on "prevailing philosophy" (Math Org), with people who want to "push everything back to the way it used to be" (Social Education), a "minority of people who are very vocal" but with "no scientific data to support any of this" (Electricity Financing), and people that "operate on fear" (Property Management).

Language used to reference the *bureaucracy* meta-narrative (row 4 of Table 3) was drawn on by five organizations from a vocabulary set that included: "systems" that "deter" with a huge "number of people" (Restaurant), and an "industrial", "linear, process-based fraction mentality" (Green Start-ups). The "bureaucracy" and "authorities", "with their bylaws" (Property Management), are a "hierarchical" "institutional system" and they "tend to be very conservative" (Math Org).

5.2. Using rhetorical devices to create the positive and the negative

While the vocabulary sets used by the organizations relate to each of the meta-narratives, specific rhetorical devices were used to emphasize the positive of the protagonist meta-narratives in contrast with the negative of the antagonist meta-narratives. Previous research identified analogies (Battilana et al., 2009), metaphors (Vaara and Tienari, in press), scapegoating, downplaying, rationalizing and appealing (Hartz and Steger, 2010) as important devices in building legitimacy. While there was evidence of metaphors, analogies, and downplaying, there were four other prominent rhetorical devices used in relation to

Table 3
Antagonist themes: vocabulary sets and meta-narratives.

Meta-narratives	Vocabulary Sets	Examples
<i>Economic</i> : maximizing the utility function based on "economic rationality" or financial self-interest (Simon, 1986: 209).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-interest • Financial gain • Immorality and pillaging 	"I don't understand, personally, how the [economic] system could allow all these billions to be pillaged. Unless people were looking the other way or to be pillaging themselves. And that is not a model that is sustainable, and it's collapsed on itself. And it's left a lot of people destitute, and it's left a lot of senior managers in a lot of sectors looking over their shoulders because they don't know if they're going to have a job tomorrow." (Social Education)
<i>Ideology</i> : based on the subjective beliefs within a society, as rigidly separated from scientific findings (Althusser, 1971)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideologically driven, beliefs-based • Irrational and fearful • Closed to exploration 	The general public hasn't "been explained the science...what they are told, they don't believe it...It's not a sure thing. It's not a sure thing the sun will rise, but the odds are pretty good that it's going to...(laughing)..." (Green Investment) "the education system is not an evidence-based, evidence-driven system at all...I would say they're ideologically-driven" (Math Org)
<i>Bureaucracy</i> : large, formal and hierarchical (Selznick, 1943), designed for control (Becker and Gordon, 1966); possessing a rigidity that symbolizes the old way of doing things and the need for change (Wolfram Cox and Hassard, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex, large-scale • Inefficient and change-resistant • Hierarchical and top-down • Linear and rational • Institutional, rule-based, conservative and traditional • Disconnected 	"There's so many easy ways to solve things, but [social services] create(s) a lot of systems around them, you know, that sort of deter kids from moving on...but we do, you know, find that there's a lot of paths of least resistance and if you try to get on those and take the kids in that direction..." and "There's a lot of money that goes into a few kids." (Restaurant) "the fundamental systems of our society were based on the mindset and linear-process-based, fraction mentality...where industrial has separated us many degrees from the thing that we're actually dealing with, whether it's food, we're not connected to the farm, the ingredients that went into it in the first place, whether it's energy, we're totally disconnected from what it means..." (Enviro Start-ups) "what they want to do, is push everything back to the way it used to be, where everything is regimented. So either we have cynical chaos or we have systemic regimentation. Neither one is attractive." (Social Education)

the protagonist and antagonist (see Table 4): contrastive typecasting, theorizing and problematizing, alignment and evaluative statements.

Contrastive typecasting is defined as: characterizing the protagonist or antagonist with a label that is contrasted with the perspective of the other, either from the protagonist's perspective, the antagonist's perspective, or in terms of what the organization is not. For example, “the Cartesians” are contrasted with educators as “healers”; and “fundamentalists” with “the

Table 4
Rhetorical devices.

Rhetorical devices	Examples
<p>Contrastive typecasting: Characterizing protagonist and antagonist with opposing labels; from the protagonist's perspective, the antagonist's perspective, or in terms of what the organization is NOT.</p>	<p>“we're outsiders, and the education is a very hierarchical, traditional 'system', so [Math Org] is an outsider” and “the education system is not an evidence-based, evidence-driven system at all. Interviewer: how are they driven? D: I would say they're ideologically-driven...So we find that with the research, what tends to happen is that you know, they say, it's never good enough, it's never enough research.” (Math Org) “(F)or me, as an environmentalist, something like this is so obvious, but for many of us, it is still like pulling teeth.” (Enviro Fundraising) “at first glance, we look like an environmentally-promoting, left-leaning magazine, so, which is, we don't say that we're left-leaning, other people will read our content and say that it's left-leaning. And we try very hard – I mean we gave Brian Mulroney the greenest [Prime Minister]...” and “Because we are communist Che Guevara people, in [the antagonist's] view.” (CSR Magazine)</p>
<p><i>Problematizing and theorizing</i> (Greenwood et al., 2002): Why the protagonist has/will achieve positive outcomes; why the antagonist has/will achieve negative outcomes.</p>	<p>“you don't see this [resistance] in Germany and stuff, you see it in Great Britain, but, and I think that speaks very highly to the way those projects have been developed in some of these European countries, the community's involved in the start – it's their initiative...they're the ones who, they're the ones who benefit from it. Again, so it's not something where a company comes in and we're going to stick a wind turbine on your neighbour's land and there's nothing you can do about it, na na na na na. You know, like, I think that speaks very highly to this method of project development as opposed to the more traditional corporate model.” (Electricity Financing) “We're not against, in any way, the Boreal forest, but our viewpoint, if it's going to be developed anyway, through mining, so how about if it was developed with Aboriginal deep involvement, deep resource – income – for Aboriginal communities, which is most of the land in the North, in the Boreal forest. But also, that it was developed with an environment plan...and I understand their viewpoint, but it's very interesting, with anything you explore, you know, I can't speak for them, but I'm assuming they're like, don't ever, don't even explore that...because we don't want to the development there. We believe it will be developed, so if you just say, don't, you know, you're never going to win” (CSR Magazine) “[the founder's] really much more of a system critic. A curriculum critic, a pedagogy critic. Not of teachers...So what we're saying, is that this is a tool for teachers, if it works, use it. If it doesn't, use something else. But that we're getting a real body of evidence, that in many classrooms, in many different places, it works.” (Math Org) “Because I have a bit of a blended revenue model, from the restaurant, and I have, I work with, I sell it to the right people, I sell it to the Bay Street crowd, right?...and they love it. It's very simple. And they, ironically, their measurements are different than, say, governments.” And “Even Bay Street people, they also work in very easy, sort of markers of success. You get some of the funding agencies now, that the amount of depth that they go into for \$25,000, it's like, I don't want your money. It's a waste of my time.” (Restaurant) “people don't understand. I mean, when you talk to climate scientists, they are in a near panic. Because they understand that what we're playing with...feeding the number of people that we have now. And I don't want to get into scare tactics, but I think the signs are pretty clear that we have a crisis, and I don't think people get that yet.” (Green Investment) “as we've gotten more and more successful – then the 'system', the institutional system, began to notice.” (Math Org) “We have, we do a lot of one-on-one time, well, before we used to be a lot of group setting type work, and a very classic life skill model where you sit kids down and you tell them, what you do are all these horrid activities. Um, and then, we just moved to a very sort of corporate model, which is more like job coaching, one-on-one counseling type thing, and it's been brilliant.” (Restaurant) “clearly, there's a gap here” and “It's not enough for you to be literate or numerate, you also have to be socially and emotionally aware. Because it's just better... (laughing) ...for you, for your peers. It's better for society, it's better for work” (Social Education)</p>
<p>Alignment: Aligning protagonist with supporters; contrasting with antagonists</p>	
<p><i>Evaluative Statements</i> (Fairclough, 2003: 37): Positive and emphatic evaluation of the protagonist; negative and emphatic evaluation of the antagonist</p>	

vanguard” (Social Education). Complex and ineffective social systems are contrasted with the protagonist, who is “not a pull yourself up by your bootstraps kind of guy, but...” (Restaurant). And CSR Magazine presents the antagonist's opinion of the Magazine with the caricature of “communist, Che Guevara people”.

Problematizing and theorizing (Greenwood et al., 2002) includes explanations for why the antagonist has/will achieve negative outcomes and why the protagonist has/will achieve positive outcomes. While this includes the rational arguments identified in prior research, which emphasize failings in the current approach and outline solutions (e.g. Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Vaara et al., 2004), the problematizing and theorizing found in the present study drew on the meta-narratives associated with the protagonist and antagonist in a more evocative manner. For example, Social Education presented the two antagonist perspectives, based in the economic or in ideology, where,

“we have cynical chaos, or we have systemic regimentation, neither one is attractive. So the only one that can really address that is civil society...And so, the notion of socio-emotional learning and so forth and so on – you've got me back to the question of social change – we think that it's part of the vanguard that's ameliorating and filling the gap”.

Alignment is defined as: connecting the protagonist with supporters and disconnecting with antagonists. For example, Math Org is aligned with teachers at the grassroots, who support them because of their scientific evidence, against the board of education at the “system” level. Similarly, Restaurant aligns itself with the corporate “Bay Street crowd”, against the government agencies with their bureaucratic processes. More broad alignment was made by Electricity Financing: “the majority of people are in support of wind turbines, but it's this minority of people who are very vocal, that, that creates problems”.

Evaluative Statements (Fairclough, 2003: 172) are positive, emphatic evaluations of the protagonist and negative, emphatic evaluations of the antagonist. Protagonists were deemed “brilliant”, “magical”, “very much catalytic and very much around fostering positive social change” (Restaurant). The antagonists are a “bizarre”, “bunch of idiots” that are “disconnected” or even unjust: “(W)e're bumping up into it in terms of degrees of injustice, in terms of the ability of our – of the planet – to support humanity as it is” (Enviro Start-ups). Often, the positive of the protagonist's meta-narratives is directly contrasted with the negative of the antagonist:

“ever since emotion was a bad thing, you know, it's a womanly thing, intuition is a bad thing, women are witches, you know, burn them...But, you know, educators are healers, like healers, they have a call to a higher order. And so, you see this incredible, grassroots, intuitive response to the gap.” (Social Education)

5.3. Protagonist creation: combining the positive meta-narratives

Often when we think of social entrepreneurship, we think of a hybrid concept composed of business and charity (Dart, 2004; Hervieux et al., 2010), but there is a much wider range of concepts employed at the organizational level. At this level, we see the combining of multiple meta-narratives beyond just business and charity, used strategically to create a character – the social enterprise as protagonist. Each organization drew on two or three of the five meta-narratives (with one exception, Mental Illness Org, which presented only a grassroots social movement meta-narrative) to build legitimacy for themselves as protagonists, emphasizing compatibility between meta-narratives and that the whole is greater than the sum of parts. I present examples from three cases to illustrate.

5.3.1. Restaurant: a charitable business

The Restaurant combines both business and charity meta-narratives in a positive light to create itself as legitimate protagonist. The business and social are fused together in a way that has allowed for great success:

“(T)his is a business that specifically employs an at-risk community, and supports and trains them and moves them out... It's a very simple model, in as much as it's a job, right? So, charity raises money and capital to start different business ventures...it's really hard to logistically separate the two.”

Here, the “corporate model” is presented as the right approach for the youth. Benefit is also emphasized for investors and customers, based on a mix of business and charity meta-narratives that “just makes sense”: “Magical. It's the easiest hundred bucks you could spend...”

5.3.2. Enviro fundraising: a charitable grassroots social movement and business

By selling their products, Enviro Fundraising emphasizes a charitable impact: “we make a difference with these products, but the schools are (also) raising money”. They also have a grassroots social movement goal: “to educate the young people...we want that to have sort of a ripple effect. So we want the students to educate their parents”. And there is focus on the business aspect being strongly connected to social outcomes: “We're a for-profit company, we're trying to set an example that, you know, there's a stereotype that you have to be a nonprofit to do good business, and we're definitely trying to show that that's not the case”, and:

“(W)e try to say that our green fundraiser is the best because of specific pieces of our program, like, there's no minimum order, we pay the shipping costs – so, the things that our direct green competitors don't offer. And then as far as being competitive to chocolate fundraisers, we just pitch ourselves as being more than just a fundraiser. You know, you might raise a little bit less, but you're doing a good thing”.

The meta-narratives used by the organization work together to show social and financial benefit, creating a movement and changing practices and attitudes. Enviro Fundraising also emphasized that even more connection between the financial and social would be very helpful to the cause: “one more thing that would help, would be if going green actually – if people could start to see more and more that going green in the long run is actually saving you money.”

5.3.3. CSR magazine: a charitable and scientific entrepreneur

The CSR Magazine combines these meta-narratives in a positive framing to create themselves as a protagonist that is dedicated, successful and growing. “(B)ecause of the way [CSR Magazine] is designed, we have the flexibility – so we see ourselves as communicating, networking brokers, across silos, and I think that's something that is important for system change and social innovation”. The organization engages in research with rigorous and consistent criteria to ensure credibility:

“(W)e need data and we need indicators... At least 50% of the baseline indicators, which makes up 50% of the score – sorry, I know it's hard to follow – has to come from publicly available data. Everything else is – we have a research team that goes digging....”

The social benefit is connected to the entrepreneurial approach that will allow them to be “global players”:

“So, I mean, if you want to look at social innovation and people that are especially creating business models, um, it's very connected to traditional entrepreneurship, regardless of the topic. Which is, you have to have a personality which is not looking for a set deal. Every week is different. And, you know, the magazine is in a nicer place right now, but it's never far from my mind, you know, what would I be continuously willing to do to see the magazine succeed?”

For the most part, all of the organizations presented the meta-narratives as complementary, working together to create the protagonist theme, providing the benefits of each of the sectors. Tensions were downplayed: “there's no real tension. It's balanced. It's what we do” (Restaurant); and,

“(F)rom a business perspective, getting our name out there, signing up more groups; from an ethical perspective, getting a lot of new people using these products, and educating people. If I had to pick one goal, I guess I would sum it up by expansion. Because with expansion comes the growth of that goal, of making an environmental difference” (Enviro Fundraising).

“(W)e view the triple bottom line approach. That's very, very important. We don't want to be a do-good organization that's like, ‘we don't care if you make any profit’ – we don't want it to only be environmental, so *humanizing the marketplace* seemed to be something that had resonance with people, that spoke what we wanted to do, and existed in one sentence” (CSR Magazine).

But at other points in the interviews the leaders mentioned tensions in actually practicing as an organization based on multiple logics: “these hybrid organizations that are both businesses and charities at the same time – it brings up a whole lot of interesting and contradictory...umm... decision-making and ways of structuring” (Math Org). And for Green Investment, the lack of economic framework meant that many environmentally successful products were not ‘economically viable’ and were therefore rejected – business rationale was presented as an acceptable factor in decision-making that trumped environmental benefit.

5.4. Rhetorical strategy: juxtaposing the protagonist with the antagonist

The rhetorical strategy used by the social enterprises involves the weaving together of protagonist and antagonist themes. The grassroots, the social, entrepreneurial and evidence-based protagonists were contrasted with the financially driven, conservative, rigid and ideological antagonists (see Table 5). Because the antagonist was always developed in opposition to the protagonist without creating a coherent antagonist identity, it is not presented independently. Instead, I present the antagonist as intertwined with the protagonist, developed within the rhetorical strategy.

The protagonist meta-narratives were often based in logics outside of the dominant logic of their field, but present in the broader society. Antagonist meta-narratives, on the other hand, often exemplified the “typical” (Restaurant) dominant institutional logic in the field, as caricaturized and vilified by the organization. I again present examples from three cases to illustrate.

For Property Management, the entrepreneurial charity and morally legitimate creation of “an alternative model, a worker co-op, and non-chemical food, and a gathering place” was in contrast to the government, who operates based on bureaucracy, impeding their development with rules that “don't make any sense”:

“[We're] trying to work with the bureaucracy at the city and so far it's been challenging... They don't see the difference between the Walmart green roof and a [Property Management green roof]...You know, we're really engaged in the community, and it'd be an educational project and so forth...”

Table 5
Rhetorical strategy.

Organizations	Rhetorical strategy
	Weaving together of protagonist and antagonist themes
Math Org	Charity, grassroots social movement and science vs. Ideology and bureaucracy
Mental Illness Org	Grassroots social movement vs. Economic
Restaurant	Charity and business vs. Bureaucracy
Property Management	Charity and entrepreneurship vs. Bureaucracy
Enviro Fundraising	Charity, grassroots social movement and business vs. Bureaucracy
Green Investment	Grassroots social movement, science and business vs. Economic and Ideology
Social Education	Charity, science and entrepreneurship vs. Economic and ideology
CSR Magazine	Charity, science and entrepreneurship vs. Ideology
Electricity Financing	Grassroots social movement and business vs. Ideology
Enviro Start-ups	Charity and entrepreneurship vs. Bureaucracy

“(Y)ou could spend your whole life trying to deal with them... so I guess, a lot of people just maybe try to change things or stop, but an entrepreneur tries to really go around the problem.”

For Math Org the antagonist is the Board of Education. They operate based on a bureaucracy that has no room for new actors: “we’re outsiders, and the education is a very hierarchical, traditional system” with “strict guidelines...so for example, we can't even be a textbook because in order to be a textbook you have to be able to last for five years, have a hard cover, and in some provinces, you have to have color!...It's very interesting and bizarre...” They also operate on ideology: they're “not an evidence-based, evidence-driven system at all...they're ideologically-driven...” Resistance is countered with the juxtaposition of the protagonist themes, research and grassroots social movement:

“(I)t's never enough research. So the control group study should be really interesting, it should be a lot harder to dismiss than the other studies that we have.” And “it's not like we *set out* to be a bookseller. So that it really did come about as a social movement.”

For Electricity Financing, the protagonist grassroots social movement meta-narrative stands in direct contrast with the ideology-based resistance from a community group specifically formed to prevent the work of the social enterprise and others in the field:

“(Y)ou really hate to speak ill of people, but these guys are a bunch of idiots... (laughing) ...there's no scientific data to support any of this other bull crap that they come up with.” And “so it's not something where a company comes in and we're going to stick a wind turbine on your neighbor's land and there's nothing you can do about it, na na na na na....You know, I think that speaks very highly to this method of project development as opposed to the more traditional corporate model.”

The organizations each emphasize that their unique and blended approach is the right one, and their outcomes are superior to the ineffective antagonist. Pulling together the vocabulary sets, rhetorical devices and meta-narratives that built the protagonist and antagonist themes, I begin to flesh out the microstructures that work together to build the rhetorical strategy found in the social entrepreneurship texts (see Fig. 1).

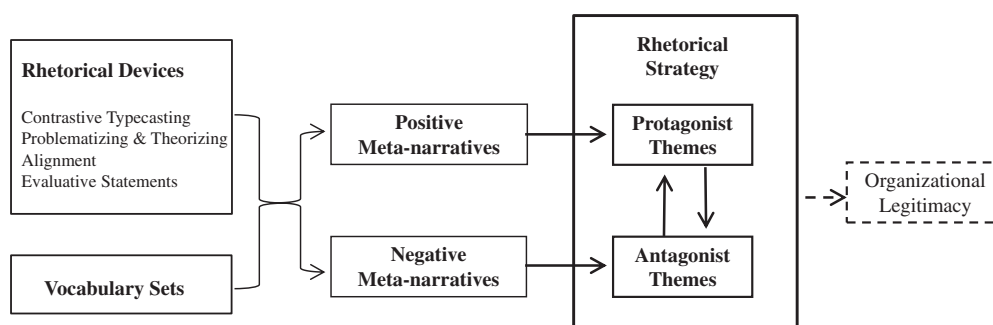


Fig. 1. Microstructures of rhetorical strategy.

More specifically, it can be seen in the framework that the vocabulary sets used by each of the organizations carried clear connections to cultural meta-narratives. These cultural meta-narratives articulate a society's views, connecting to the underlying beliefs and values, producing meaning and creating a comprehensive explanation that justifies a given structure (Erickson, 2001; Irving and Klenke, 2004; Sandlos, 1998). In doing so, meta-narratives have the power to resolve a conflict or legitimacy challenge. The rhetoric used by the social entrepreneurs presented only the favorable side of the charity, grassroots social movement, science, business and entrepreneurship stories and the down side of the economic, ideology and bureaucracy stories, highlighting the positive and negative through use of discrete rhetorical devices. The positive meta-narratives were combined into protagonist themes that emphasized synergy and benefit. Antagonist themes were juxtaposed with the protagonist, further emphasizing the appropriateness (and therefore the legitimacy) of the protagonist's approach and outcomes in contrast.

5.5. Effectiveness of protagonist rhetoric: preliminary findings from stakeholder interviews

Interviews with stakeholders provide tentative insights into the impact of the rhetorical strategy on organizational legitimacy. The interviews were based on the following questions: Do the stakeholders see the organization as legitimate? Do they reflect back the rhetorical themes of the organization? And, do they indicate that the underlying meta-narratives are legitimate *in this context and combined in this way*? Overall, stakeholders saw the organizations as legitimate and validated the effectiveness of the protagonist theme by using the positive meta-narratives in their own rhetoric about the benefits and strengths of the organizations, including reference to the specific combination of meta-narratives as the right approach.

For Social Education, Stakeholder G.1 is a researcher operating in the resiliency field, technically an impartial actor, but from the same sub-group within the broader education field; Stakeholders G.2 and G.3 are customers, a teacher and a support person in a college. The teacher did not choose to work with Social Education's program and is from the broader education field, and the college support person straddles the resiliency sub-field and the broader education field. Stakeholder G.4 is a private investor, relatively impartial and representative of the broader field. For Social Education, the stakeholders identified the enterprise as "glorious" because of the charity and science aspects of it: "It's not voodoo. It's not, you know – it's simply a good, solid psychology that will help kids become more aware of themselves and more aware and appreciative of others" (Stakeholder G.3). The entrepreneurship piece presented both strengths and weaknesses: "(K)nowing something about small businesses, I know, really, cash flow is a critical piece. And that can really undermine progress, and undermine taking advantage of opportunities" (Stakeholder G.1). The language used perhaps indicates the transitional state of the organization, needing to move from entrepreneurial to business: it's at a "tipping point" where "there are opportunities to follow up, probably tedious, but important tasks that could be done – it's just those kinds of things that you need to be bigger. There's a point where you just have to grow in order to grow" (Stakeholder G.4).

For Enviro Fundraising, Stakeholder E.1 was leading a church group's fundraising efforts and Stakeholder E.2 was an individual fundraiser. Both were responsible for choosing the fundraising company, and represent environmentally conscious consumers within the field. Both stakeholders chose the organization because they appreciated the charitable, business and grassroots social movement benefits: "for the schools, of course, with the kids, and if the kids get involved, their parents get involved. And that's how you spread their seed" and "I think that is one thing I've discovered – they would rather buy something and get something back for their money, rather than donating \$40..." (Stakeholder E.1).

For the Mental Illness Org, Stakeholders B.1 and B.2 are leaders of national family support organizations, closely aligned with the organization from a sub-group within the mental health field. Stakeholder B.3 is a funder within the mental health sector, a somewhat impartial actor from the broader field operating in the space between the charitable groups and the mental healthcare system. Interestingly, this organization has recently merged with another group in order to avoid financial collapse and the stakeholders only partially supported the meta-narrative underlying the organization's protagonist theme. The funder,

Stakeholder B.3, was ambivalent about the organization and actually identified additional meta-narratives, science and business, which would be helpful for this organization operating in the broader mental health field:

“It seems that, for the organizations that really seem to have the largest impact, they have really, kind of, three components: you have to have some focus around advocacy to be able to advocate for change, which is more of a public policy perspective; and you have something that focuses on, you know, something that is probably more focused on the science, or the provision of direct services; and I think the financial piece is just so that you can create awareness, but also help create a funding stream, and there's the connection back to business. Those are the groups that seem to – seem to succeed, I think, the best” (Stakeholder B.3).

Each of these stakeholders highlighted the meta-narratives important in their relationships with the organization. While preliminary at best, the supportive stakeholders underscored the same compatible combination of protagonist meta-narratives that the organizations presented in their rhetoric. The one ambivalent stakeholder of an unsuccessful organization presented additional meta-narratives required for success within that organization's field. More research is required to gauge the impact of this rhetorical strategy on the broad range of stakeholders within the organizations' institutional field.

6. Discussion

Based on an institutional perspective, this paper explores how social enterprises gain legitimacy for social change. The organizations wove together protagonist and antagonist themes in a rhetorical strategy that aims to build legitimacy for the organization. Sectors merged within these organizations, creating private sector social firms, and scientific charities and businesses, using the right approach with effective outcomes. In contrast, those impeding the social change were portrayed as antagonists, using the wrong approach, with ineffective outcomes. These organizations can be seen as making an attempt to tap into the moral and cognitive legitimacies granted to each of the cultural meta-narratives on which they drew. Moral legitimacy is based on an evaluation of an activity as the right thing to do (Suchman, 1995) and as such, refers to a society's ideas of social justice and injustice, freedom and oppression; cognitive legitimacy is based on the comprehensibility and taken-for-grantedness of a given form, in that it is seen as *plausible, predictable, inevitable* and/or *permanent* (Suchman, 1995: 584). Similar to the entrepreneur in a new industry who wants to appear different, but not too much so (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Martens et al., 2007; Zott and Huy, 2007), these social enterprises drew on the cognitive legitimacy of the underlying meta-narratives as understandable and taken-for-granted, but created a unique framing by blending them to suit their own situation. And the negative antagonist creation emphasized the contradiction between the society's values and the status quo that, when woven together with the positive values within the protagonist theme, creates a tension that is solved by the proposed social change. This has several implications for the field of social entrepreneurship and also for the fields of institutional entrepreneurship and rhetoric.

For the field of social entrepreneurship, it was found that a protagonist/antagonist rhetorical strategy was used within this context. The paper identifies the specific meta-narratives and combinations used by 10 enterprises in their quest for legitimacy. In doing this, I contribute to our understanding of how social entrepreneurs leverage cultural and institutional resources and manage issues of resistance to change (Dacin et al., 2010). At this time and place combinations of charity, grassroots social movement, science, business and entrepreneurship were presented positively; combinations of economic, ideology and bureaucracy were presented negatively. These organizations all share a goal of social transformation, but use different combinations of meta-narratives, such as *grassroots social movement, science and business* or *charity, science and entrepreneurship*, as well as the expected *charity and business* combination, to create legitimacy. The range of meta-narratives drawn on by these organizations goes beyond the typical understanding of social enterprise as a combination of business and charity (Dees, 2001). As speculated by Hervieux et al. (2010), it is broader than rhetoric found at the domain level that included only business, entrepreneurship, community and advocacy/social change logics (Nicholls, 2010). But, similar to this work at the domain level, the contrasting logics within the protagonist meta-narratives were peacefully combined to highlight the positive, diminishing tension. Contrasting logics between protagonist and antagonist were intensified.

At a higher level of abstraction, the specifics of what is considered legitimate are temporary and grounded in the particular context, and therefore it is the process of creating heroes and villains at a more general level that is (possibly) generalizable to other contexts of change. I extend and complement existing institutional entrepreneurship work that examines rhetoric used by actors engaged in debate about a specific issue (e.g. Golant and Sillince, 2007; Hardy and Maguire, 2009, 2010; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Vaara et al., 2006) by using multiple case studies to investigate the common rhetorical strategies employed across a wide range of social enterprises from separate fields, at different points in their development, involved in various types of social change. Previous work has found that portrayal of a protagonist and antagonist is a common rhetorical strategy, but this characterization was based on problematizations of the status quo and theorizations of change (Greenwood et al., 2002) – organizations were portrayed as protagonist in their narratives because they are positioned to provide a solution to the problem, and others are antagonists because they are blocking the solution (Golant and Sillince, 2007). While there was evidence of this rational problem/solution-based argument for protagonist and antagonist characters, I also found a more connotative and evocative use of language employed to build this rhetorical strategy based on culturally accepted meta-narratives and their composite vocabulary sets and rhetorical devices. Built from these elements, the protagonist and antagonist themes were then

woven together into a rhetorical strategy used to create tension, highlight the contrast between opposing actors and persuade audiences of the organization's legitimacy.

Several interesting issues emerge from the comparison of multiple organizations. One is the degree of marginalization faced by each enterprise and its impact on the rhetorical strategy. Social enterprises are often marginal organizations working with marginalized groups (Mair and Marti, 2009). But even within the organizations presented here there is a wide range in the degree of marginalization. For example, Mental Illness Org is arguably one of the most marginal within society and within its field. On the other hand, CSR Magazine was marginal when it began, and environmental groups were marginal at the beginning of the environmental movement, but are arguably no longer marginal within North American society. One critical area to explore would be the impact of marginalization on the legitimation strategy. A related concern is the impact of organizational age on the legitimacy struggle. A 26 year old organization such as the Mental Illness Org, while still entrepreneurial in terms of their transformational social change agenda, is likely in a very different developmental place than an organization that has just begun. These issues both highlight the importance of organizational differences. While this paper focused on *common* microstructures of rhetorical strategy, another important question for social entrepreneurship research is to explore the differences. This matter is relevant between organizations within the same institutional field, between different social issues, and over time.

This research also highlights other avenues for future research. Because of the small number of stakeholders involved, assessing the actual legitimacy gained through the rhetorical strategy is beyond the scope of this study, but is an important next step. All of the meta-narratives drawn on by the organizations possess face validity and research supporting their importance. However, the effectiveness of each concept as a legitimation strategy rests on the flexibility attributed to the meta-narrative – there must be social acceptance for the meta-narratives within the specific organizational context and for the specific combinations that are intermingled, allowing for the meta-narratives to continue carrying positive connotations. For example, business is unquestionably a widely legitimate organizational form, but research at the domain level has already identified the legitimacy struggle for social entrepreneurship in drawing on business *and* charity models of service (Hervieux et al., 2010; Nicholls, 2010). Similar to Battilana and Dorado's (2010) study of two pioneering commercial microfinance organizations, the competing logics must be rhetorically integrated, reducing tension and creating balance. The organizations here presented themselves as built from the strengths of each model, but a hybrid model may have instead the weaknesses, and will have to defend itself against this threat to its legitimacy (Sud et al., 2009). Further analysis of stakeholder rhetoric, particularly from stakeholders that represent all aspects of the institutional field, is an important direction for future research that would show the effectiveness of the protagonist/antagonist rhetorical strategy.

Additionally, stakeholder interviews highlighted an additional rhetorical device: that which is unsaid, or “significant absences” (Fairclough, 2003: 37). It was used by Dey and Steyaert (2010) in their analysis of the domain of social entrepreneurship and presented by Vaara and Tienari (2002) as a means of revealing the ideology and power structures that lie below the surface. In this study, several aspects of the interview texts hint at what is unsaid, particularly in the presentation of the antagonist, and also when compared to Stakeholder B.3, the one ambivalent stakeholder for an unsuccessful organization. It is quite likely that there are other meta-narratives used within the institutional fields that did not show up in the rhetoric of the social enterprises, and their omission may be an important part of their legitimation strategy or may be a reason for their failure. While methodologically challenging, this is an avenue for future research that would provide great insight for both social entrepreneurship and rhetoric research.

Also, the current study includes only one unsuccessful organization, which presented an interesting contrast with the other organizations. Mental Illness Org drew on only one meta-narrative and had an unsupportive stakeholder that identified additional relevant meta-narratives. This indicates that organizations are not able to draw on any meta-narratives they choose to create their protagonist theme, but must balance the expectations of stakeholders. Because this was the only organization that was unsuccessful, the sample size is too small to draw conclusions and further study is required. More research into both successful and unsuccessful organizations and the impact of their rhetoric on stakeholders would help to highlight the factors most relevant to success. Additionally, comparison of the effectiveness of different meta-narratives within a single sector would also further our understanding in this area.

At a practical level, this research has implications for social enterprise strategy. It became clear in the interviews that enterprise leaders were not necessarily conscious of the rhetorical strategies they employed or the cultural myths they drew on to legitimize their organizations. This research indicates that rhetorical strategy development should be addressed within the broader strategy of any organization involved in institutional change and also developed as a core competency. By increasing our understanding of the rhetorical tools used to build legitimacy and strategies used by similar ventures, these organizations can become increasingly effective at constructing legitimacy for themselves. The rhetorical resources available provide a strategic leverage point, enabling social entrepreneurship to build support for change despite a constraining institutional environment, the organization's lack of power and their limited resources. Rhetorical analysis is vital in this context, given the inherent paradox of seeking legitimacy based on institutional norms that the social enterprise seeks to change.

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Appendix A

Interview guide

1. Can you tell me about the history and current operations of the organization?
 - a. What are some of the important milestones for the organization?
2. How do you define social change?
 - a. What is involved in creating that change?
 - b. What role is your organization taking in that?
3. What are the biggest challenges you've encountered?
 - a. How have you dealt with these challenges?
 - b. Can you tell me about a specific incident/challenge and how the organization responded?
 - c. Have you had any challenges with particular stakeholder groups?
4. What are the top priorities for the organization?
 - a. What are your biggest concerns right now?
5. All of this has happened in a particular time and place. How do you think this has helped or hindered your organization?
6. Can you map the internal and external stakeholders for the organization?
7. How do you manage relationships with these stakeholder groups?
8. In terms of dealing with stakeholders, what have been some of the highs and lows for the organization?
 - a. How did that particular relationship come about?
9. How do you explain what you are trying to do to the various stakeholder groups?
 - a. How do you persuade others to support the organization?

Appendix B

B.1

Interview participants.

Organization	Participants	Role
Math Org	A	Executive Director
Mental Illness Org	B	Executive Director
	B.1	Founder/Executive Director of national family support group (member)
	B.2	Board member and Chairman of national family support group (member)
	B.3	Mental Health Funder
Restaurant	C	Executive Director
Property Management	D	Partner and President
Enviro Fundraising	E	Co-owner and School and Group Liaison
	E.1	Church Group Customer
	E.2	Individual Customer
Green Investment	F	Director
Social Education	G	Creator and CEO
	G.1	Resiliency Research Partner
	G.2	Customer (teacher)
	G.3	Customer (Aboriginal group leader)
	G.4	Investor and Advisor
CSR Magazine	H	Co-owner and Publisher
Electricity Financing	I	Program Manager
Enviro Start-ups	J	Owner

Respondents were assigned codes to maintain confidentiality.

B.2

Archival data sources.

Organizations	Online sources	Pamphlets and newsletters	Other
Math Org	Website, podcast	Pamphlets	TV interview with founder
Mental Illness Org	Website	Pamphlets, Newsletters	
Restaurant	Website, online video	Newsletters	
Property Management	Website	Newsletters	
Enviro Fundraising	Website, blog		
Green Investment	Website		Newspaper editorial
Social Education	Website, blog		Investor presentation, Whitepaper
CSR Magazine	Website, podcasts and online videos		Magazines and reports
Electricity Financing	Website		Business plan
Enviro Start-ups	Website, blog, Twitter		Presentations

Only sources authored by the organizations were included.

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