

RESEARCH

Open Access



The mastery of entrepreneurial project execution in social enterprises in Uganda: a path to sustainable development in rural Africa

James Elvis Mbiro¹, Desmond Tutu Ayentimi^{1*}  and Mark Wickham¹

*Correspondence:

Desmond Tutu Ayentimi
desmond.ayentimi@utas.edu.au
¹Tasmanian School of Business and
Economics, University of Tasmania,
Hobart, Australia

Abstract

Traditional project management approaches have been criticised for their limited applicability in dynamic, resource-constrained, and uncertain environments. This paper addresses this gap by focusing on the execution element of the Entrepreneurial Project Management (EPM) model. Focusing on social enterprises that operate in Uganda's complex institutional and environmental context, it validates and explores how entrepreneurial project execution is practised and operationalised. This paper employs an exploratory qualitative design, drawing on qualitative data through face-to-face interviews and document analysis. The evidence from this study supports the shift from traditional project execution process to entrepreneurial execution process in social enterprises. This shift to entrepreneurial project execution is reinforced by project managers capability to: (a) recognise and explore opportunities, (b) be proactive in managing projects, and (c) manage project knowledge. Beyond the validation of the execution element of the EPM model, the findings underscore the need for project managers in social enterprises to build essential dynamic capability around proactiveness, opportunity exploration and project knowledge management. Social enterprises in Africa operate in an environment characterised by resource scarcity, high uncertainty, institutional gaps and rapidly changing socio-economic conditions. Thus, these capabilities are strategic for social enterprise survival and long-term social impact. The overall value of these dynamic capabilities identified in the study is to equip project managers with operational discipline and the adaptive mindset required to achieve social impact in complex, dynamic and often resource-constrained project management environments in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). As these capabilities are refined in social enterprises, their potential to drive sustainable development outcomes in rural Africa becomes increasingly evident and significant.

Keywords Entrepreneurial project execution, Social enterprises, Sustainability, Uganda

© The Author(s) 2026. **Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License, which permits any non-commercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this licence to share adapted material derived from this article or parts of it. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

Introduction

Over the past decade, traditional project management (PM) has been criticised for not being sufficient in responding to the dynamic and unpredictable nature of contemporary project management environment, particularly those in emerging and developing market contexts (Fonrouge et al., 2019). Primarily, the rapid market changes, emerging technology and new approaches have disrupted the traditional project management styles, driving the PM profession to evolve (Sycheva et al., 2021). Each project faces unique challenges, and project teams must adapt their approaches to deliver the intended benefits. A project is a system of elements that interact with each other, epitomised by complexity due to difficulties in managing human behaviour, system behaviour, uncertainty, dynamism, and ambiguity (Kerzner, 2022). PM scholars and practitioners concede that project complexity impacts project performance negatively (Mbiru et al., 2020). As PM scholars and practitioners are acquainted with complexity and ambiguity, there is significant interest in embedding entrepreneurial tenets in PM (Fonrouge et al. 2019; Ika et al. 2020b). This is even more critical in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), where the project environment is largely characterised by resource scarcity, high uncertainty, institutional gaps and rapidly changing socio-economic conditions (Mbiru et al., 2024).

Social enterprises add value beyond traditional economic agency and therefore have a critical role in advancing sustainable development in rural Africa by tackling economic, environmental and social challenges that governments and markets struggle to reach (Rotheroe & Richards, 2007). Picciotti (2017, p.233) asserts that “the concepts of sustainable development and social economy are currently undergoing a process of convergence, determined by the extension of the concept of sustainability and the role of social enterprises”. According to recent anecdotal evidence, Africa is home to an estimated 2.18 million social enterprises providing essential services, creating decent jobs, and strengthening the resilience of communities, predominantly in underserved rural regions (Mbiru et al., 2024). The mission-driven business models of social enterprises, enable them to deliver essential services in agriculture, climate resilience, health and education, which are pivotal to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The emerging literature continues to highlight a strong correlation between activities of social enterprises and the achievement of sustainable development outcomes, particularly across social, economic, and environmental challenges in rural Africa (Kassim et al., 2020; Picciotti, 2017). The focal point of social enterprises on nurturing both social and economic inclusion and leveraging market-based innovative solutions to solve social problems situate them as a catalyst for sustainable development in Africa.

Indeed, corporate and social entrepreneurial theories present a contemporary response to traditional PM constraints (Tywoniak et al., 2021). Theoretically, project implementation is contingent on applying specific entrepreneurial capabilities and competencies—creativity, innovativeness, organic and/or adaptive management style (Tamberg et al., 2021). To address the urgent calls for entrepreneurial theory to be embedded in PM conceptualisation, Mbiru et al. (2020) suggested a framework for mapping EPM processes. The EMP process model depicts a process through which social enterprises can incorporate entrepreneurial principles and practices into PM processes (see Fig. 1). This paper, therefore, undertakes an analytical exploration of how entrepreneurial project execution is practised and operationalised, whilst validating the execution element of the EPM model by drawing evidence from social enterprises in Uganda. Conceptually,

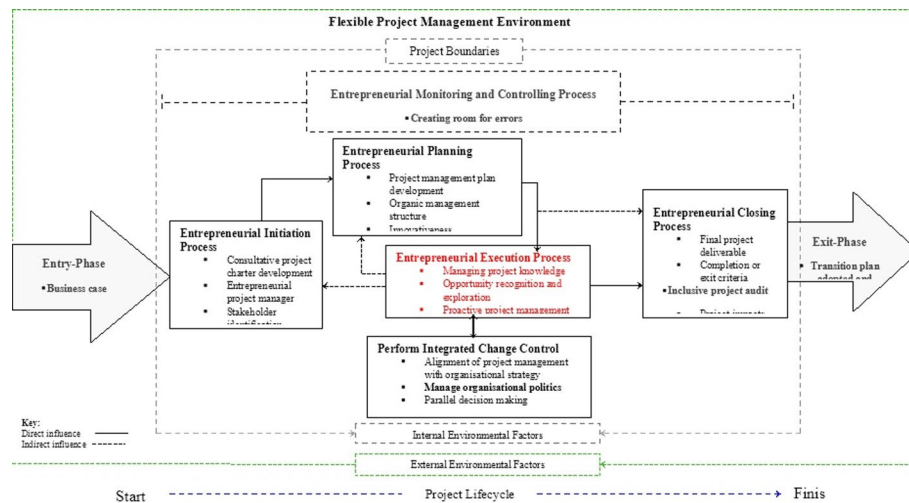


Fig. 1 Entrepreneurial project management model (EPM model)

the study advances the EPM framework by refining constructs, identifying boundary conditions, and demonstrating how project execution process operate differently in resource-constrained social enterprise contexts compared to prior studies mostly in Western economies. In addition, the paper draws important social, economic, and environmental (triple-bottom line) implications with the aim of recognizing how social enterprises can leverage entrepreneurial project execution process to contribute to sustainable development outcomes, particularly across the social, economic, and environmental dimensions in rural Africa.

In Uganda, project managers in general continue to navigate high levels of unpredictability, institutional weaknesses, ambiguities and limited access to resources (Mbiru et al., 2024). As such, undertaking an analytical exploration of how entrepreneurial project execution is practised and operationalised, whilst validating the execution element of the EPM model is timely and at the intersection of project management, entrepreneurship, and social enterprise development in SSA. The empirical evidence from this study supports the shift from traditional project execution process to entrepreneurial execution process in social enterprises. This shift is reinforced by project managers capabilities to: (a) recognise and explore opportunities, (b) be proactive in managing projects, and (c) manage project knowledge. Importantly, beyond the validation of the execution element of the EPM model, the study identified several novel elements and underscore the need for project managers in social enterprises to build essential dynamic capabilities around proactiveness, opportunity exploration and project knowledge management to contribute to sustainable development outcomes in Africa. These capabilities potentially offer valuable contributions to entrepreneurial project management theory and practice in several ways.

First, building capabilities of proactiveness helps project managers to foresee changes in community needs and donor priorities align with sustainable development goals. In resource constraint context like Uganda, proactive behaviour helps project managers to form new alliances, redesign project activities and secure alternative funding sources to ensure project sustainability. Second, opportunity-oriented project managers can generate transformative ideas and mobilise innovative indigenous solutions to unlock new opportunities for social impact around the SDGs. Third, strong project knowledge

management capabilities enable project managers to strengthen organisational memory to ensure continuity. Theoretically, the paper extends the application of the EPM model to a new empirical setting, enhancing its generalizability in project management literature. The link between entrepreneurship theories and EPM, offers new project management insights that translate the EPM model into actionable guidance for project managers. Collectively, beyond the validation of the EPM framework, the overall value of these dynamic capabilities identified in the study equips project managers with operational discipline and the adaptive mindset required to achieve social impact in complex, dynamic and often resource-constrained environments in SSA.

The social enterprise ecosystem in Sub-Saharan Africa

Social enterprises generally draw on mission-based business models to advance their social intentions and operate either for not-for-profit, profit or a hybrid of profit and non-profit (Farhoud et al., 2023). Social enterprises in Africa have emerged as essential agents of rural development with the possibility to help address the ongoing service supply disparities, although hampered by dwindling foreign aid and funding options, which limit their capacity to broaden their service delivery (Mbiru et al., 2023). Social entrepreneurs in SSA represent a unique blend of inspiration, with demonstrated intent of achievement orientation and the need for operational sustainability (Mogotsi et al., 2025; Wanyoike et al., 2021). In South Africa, for instance, social enterprises have received great attention as critical partners in bottom-up, subsidiary approach to public service provision, significantly contributing to sustainable development (Mogotsi et al., 2025). Given that the public sector alone in Africa cannot achieve the SDGs for the poorest inhabitants, social enterprises have a major role to play (Sheik et al., 2022). Nonetheless, social enterprises in the region will need supportive ecosystems such as networks of associations, dynamic capabilities and innovative approaches to scale up and accelerate their service delivery to reach the poorest inhabitants.

In Africa, foreign-funded social enterprises tend to take little risk compared to self-funded counterparts, as foreign support cushions the financial fragility and makes them less prone to financial distress (Littlewood et al., 2018; Urban et al., 2024). Indeed, the recent unrest that erupted in the US following funding cuts to the USAID, has significantly contributed to funding withdrawal, threatening NGOs delivery of essential social and medical services, especially in Africa and other developing countries. Africa's development aspirations continue to deeply rely on donor agencies and NGOs, generating international debate on why the region struggles with self-reliance. Rivera-Santos et al. (2015) reported that a majority (55%) of African social enterprises have a mix of donated and trading income sources compared to only 16% of social enterprises gaining all their income from trading. This is due to the readily available donor funding in developing economies (Farhoud et al., 2023; Littlewood et al., 2015). However, dwindling donor funding has led to the influx of traditional NGOs shifting into market trading activities. It is unclear whether there is self-sufficiency through market trading among organisations established as social enterprises, as many of these 'typical NGOs' are moving into the social enterprise business model (Littlewood & Holt, 2018). Unfortunately, most social enterprises operating in Africa demonstrate greater concern for accumulating resources and sustaining their organisations than improving their social impact.

Despite the operational dynamism and complexity in SSA, the visibility of poverty and vulnerability enables compassion to be transformed into social enterprises (Jeong et al., 2020; Muma et al., 2024). As Littlewood and Holt (2018) noted, awareness and understanding of the social enterprise concept in SSA is still generally low because of the absence of regulatory and policy support in most countries in the region. Beyond the absence of regulatory and policy support, the dearth of entrepreneurial capabilities amongst project managers implies that creating workable and self-sustaining social enterprise businesses requires special and unique skill sets to manage projects on schedule, budget, and quality (Mbiru et al., 2024). This study provides insight into how social enterprise project managers navigate such complexity and ambiguity through entrepreneurial project execution processes. In addition, such a discussion on the project management ecosystem offers a potentially unique approach to sustaining social enterprise operations. Moreover, understanding entrepreneurial project execution in social enterprises adds to the limited but growing body of literature in SSA and contributes to decolonising project management knowledge by primarily illustrating established ideas in a new setting.

Conceptualising the entrepreneurial project execution process

Mbiru et al. (2020) developed a framework for mapping EPM processes. The EPM process model differentiates six EPM processes from initiation through to project closing processes that integrate entrepreneurial elements with conventional project management principles (Fig. 1). However, given the level of density required to analytically explore the entire EPM model, this paper focuses on the entrepreneurial project execution process, which requires project managers to demonstrate three sets of entrepreneurial competencies and dynamic capabilities: (a) proactive project management (b) opportunity recognition and exploration, and (c) managing project knowledge. The rationale for focusing on the entrepreneurial project execution element of the EPM model is driven by the fact that it is the most theoretically underdeveloped as well as practically problematic phase in project management. Entrepreneurial project execution accentuates organisational learning while undertaking and responding to project uncertainty, which makes it practically and theoretically suitable to explore in SSA, an environment characterised by resource scarcity, uncertainty, institutional gaps and rapidly changing socio-economic conditions.

Opportunity recognition and exploration

A key component of the EPM's execution process is the project manager's ability to recognise and explore opportunities that add value to their operational processes by analytically executing new and innovative project ideas (Trojic, 2016). To rationally execute new and innovative project ideas, managers need to engage in benchmarking organisational processes and drawing on expert judgement to pursue opportunities to consolidate their operations as organisations become more project-based (Kerzner, 2022). Social enterprises develop new knowledge and strategies through exploiting innovative measures such as benchmarking similar organisations to survive in a dynamic environment (Mbiru et al., 2023). Andriopoulos and Lewis (2009) assert that entrepreneurial organisations must excel in fostering innovation and creativity to align with their strategic business agenda. Similarly, senior-level project managers must demonstrate

leadership behaviours and recognise and explore opportunities as a collective responsibility involving all necessary organisational employees at the lower management levels (Rodríguez-Rivero et al., 2020).

Proactive project management

Proactive project management is an approach where project managers anticipate issues, opportunities and risks before they occur and take early actions to influence outcomes (Mbiru et al., 2024). According to Fangel (2018), proactive project behaviour entails a purposeful shift towards a forward-thinking approach, spanning from the project initiation phase to its closing phase. Proactive project behaviour provides for the active involvement and commitment of senior managers and key stakeholders during the project's initial phase (Gladden, 2009). It allows project managers to plan for amplification of the 'project sponsor role' in the preliminary stage of the project processes (Mbiru et al., 2020). Proactive project managers embrace adaptability and resilience in dealing with project challenges. Through adaptability, project managers can evaluate the project's known unknowns using best practices, whilst exploring and adjusting to unknowns or chaotic situations (Ika et al. 2020a). Proactiveness enables organisations to optimise project activities whilst delineating project execution documentation from management documentation, which enhances efficiency and fostering clarity in project management processes. Proactiveness necessitates periodic restructuring of organisational functions, structures, management styles, and quality requirements (Niemann et al., 2022).

Managing project knowledge

Project knowledge management guarantees that insights, information and know-how are created, captured, shared, and reused throughout the project lifecycle (Gasik, 2011). Project knowledge encompasses various elements, including the tacit and explicit knowledge of the project team, as well as expert knowledge (e.g., consultancy reports) and all the associated project management artefacts (Mbiru et al., 2021). According to Gasik (2011), the management of project knowledge aims to harness the accumulated skills, experience, and expertise of the project team, ensuring their utilisation in both ongoing and future projects. Organisations must create an atmosphere of trust for team members to be motivated to share their knowledge and experiences (Pavez et al., 2021). Extant literature highlights the significance of 'managing project knowledge', often embedded implicitly within the diverse membership operative in each project (Tamberg et al., 2021). Whilst tacit knowledge includes organisational beliefs, insights, and experiences, explicit knowledge is associated with documented knowledge that can be readily codified using words, pictures, and numbers (Tamberg et al., 2021). Project knowledge management involves leveraging existing project information and deriving new knowledge to achieve the project's objectives (Gasik, 2011). Managing project knowledge is a continuous process in the project life cycle. It involves actively sharing and integrating diverse knowledge domains, such as contextual and conceptual project knowledge, to promote project sustainability (Fewings & Henjewe, 2019).

Collectively, entrepreneurial project execution necessitates the adoption of specific social entrepreneurial capabilities and competencies (i.e., opportunity recognition and exploration, proactive project management, and managing project knowledge). Whilst opportunity recognition and exploration maintain regular improvements in the

execution processes, proactiveness in project management optimises the potential for the successful implementation of strategic plans (Scott-Young et al., 2019).

Methodology

Studying African social enterprises is particularly relevant in Uganda, an under-researched context within PM and social entrepreneurship literature with one of the rapidly evolving social enterprise ecosystems in SSA. The country's socio-economic context is characterised by uncertainty and institutional complexity that entrepreneurial project execution seeks to navigate, making it ideal for empirical investigation. This study adopted an embedded multi-case study approach to investigate the lived experiences of key informants regarding the application and operationalisation of EPM. Employing an embedded multi-case study methodology facilitates various forms of triangulation by using multiple levels of analysis, thereby enhancing the richness of the study's findings (Eisenhardt, 2021). A multi-case study approach is suitable for research conducted within well-defined boundary conditions and with a clear procedure for case study selection (Volmar and Eisenhardt, 2020) and is well-suited for examining under-researched and under-theorised settings.

Whilst addressing the research question, this study applied an exploratory qualitative research design across six purposively selected social enterprises in Uganda (see Table 1). In exploratory qualitative research involving multiple cases, selecting six cases is suitable because it strikes a theoretical balance between breadth (cross-case comparison) and depth (rich within-case analysis) (Eisenhardt, 2021). In addition, the six cases selected provide enough variation to analytically observe pattern convergence and divergence and to test whether emergent theoretical propositions hold across different contexts.

Contact information for the case organisations and key informants was first sourced through online. At the senior management level, initial contact was established with key informants via email, seeking their authorisation to engage with tactical and operational managers who were actively involved in the tactical and operational facets of project design and implementation. Subsequently, telephone discussions were conducted to delineate the interview procedure and to extend invitations for research participation. The need to recognise and acknowledge important issues related to the management of projects in a more challenging context supported the researchers' concern to draw primary evidence from the three different managerial levels: top, middle and lower. Key informants were purposively selected, guided by their specific managerial experiences

Table 1 Sample characteristics

Social enterprise*	1	2	3	4	5	6
Founded	1990	1981	1981	1986	1965	1996
Core projects	Agroforestry, nutrition, research	Agriculture, water, and sanitation	Agriculture, education, agribusiness	Agriculture, research, advocacy	Agriculture, health, education	Agriculture, health, governance
Legal structure	Limited by guarantee, no share capital	Catholic Church	Charitable trust	Limited by guarantee, no share capital	Catholic Church	Limited by guarantee, no share capital

* Organisation names have been coded to retain anonymity, NGO – Non-Government Organisation, kms – kilometres
Other information sources include organisations' websites, program manuals, and annual reports.

relating to integrating entrepreneurship in their social enterprise project management processes. Managerial experience of all key informants averaged seven years, helping the research to benefit from their depth of managerial experience. To ensure data triangulation, key informants representing senior executives, project managers, operational staff and key personnel directly involved in project execution, specifically from the three operational, tactical, and strategic managerial hierarchies were included (see Table 2). This approach simplified the cross-checking of information and captured the diversity of managerial perspectives to enrich the research findings.

Key informants were formally introduced to the research project through the distribution of information sheets and the requisite consent forms. Participation was strictly voluntary, and a detailed explanation of this voluntary nature was provided to all participants prior to the commencement of interviews. In addition, consent was sought and obtained from the key informants to record the interviews. The exploration of the entrepreneurial execution concept of the EPM model was achieved by posing ‘what’ and ‘when’ questions (i.e., what principles drive your project implementation process? What do you consider to be the most important issues in the execution stage of a project?), explanation of the concept was achieved by asking the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (i.e., how do you apply entrepreneurial principles in your project execution processes? Why do you do it that way?). This approach facilitated the discovery of associations between cases (Eisenhardt, 2021). For verbatim transcription and to maintain methodological consistency and rigour, all the 28 key informant interviews were conducted in English and were audio recorded.

To complement the interviews, documents were collected from the participating organisations, supplemented by publicly available records to include, inter alia, project reports (e.g., Annual Progress Report), strategic planning summaries (e.g., Implementation Review Document), funding proposals, and meeting minutes from all the six social enterprises. Public documents analysed included organisation websites, magazines (e.g., food and production magazine, and PROLINNOVA magazine from KUL), newsletters, published books from SOC and KUL social enterprises and Newspaper archives (e.g., The Daily Monitor, The New Vision, The Independent, and The East African newspapers). Each document was assessed for authenticity, credibility and relevance before

Table 2 Managerial roles of the key informants

Social enterprise**	1	2	3	4	5	6
Senior/Top Management	*Executive Director	*Head of Programs	*Executive Director	*Program Director	*Country Project Director	*Senior Programs Officer
	*Programs Manager	*Senior Programs Manager	*Head of Finance/HR		*Capacity Leader	
Middle/Tactical Management	*Project Coordinator	*Operations manager	*Network Leader	*Project Coordinator	*Programs Manager	*Project Officer
	*Operations Manager	*Project Manager	*Centre Manager	*Grants Manager		
Lower/operational Management	*Project Managers (x2)	*Community Development Officers (x2)	*Project Managers (x2)	*Project Manager	*Project Manager	*None

** Social enterprise names have been coded to retain anonymity.

*Respondents represented by their respective titles to retain anonymity

inclusion in the analysis. Documentary evidence provides a non-reactive data source that offers insight into how organisations represent their project management practices over time (Tywoniak et al., 2021).

To analyse the data whilst using the QSR NVivo (version 21) software, we adopted the Gioia et al. (2013) methodological approach, which is well-suited for inductive theory-building in organisational studies research. NVivo supports the creation and retention of memos where trends and emerging themes were generated. This approach allowed us to move interactively from rich, informant-centric descriptions to theoretically abstracted concepts whilst maintaining a strong empirical grounding. The analytical process was conducted in three phases. First, we coded all interview transcripts and secondary data documents line-by-line, closely adhering to the key informant's opinions. This inductive process yielded a broad set of descriptive codes, such as resource exploration, managerial foresight and scope creep management. Second, through collaborative team discussions, data classification was done to organise the various dimensions of data by grouping attributes related to the concepts being examined. By pattern-matching themes from the data, recurring patterns were noted to consolidate individual facets of the data into coherent themes. Initial parent node classifications were based on the broad unit of analysis guided by Mbiru et al.'s (2020) entrepreneurial project execution processes that were identified prior to the fieldwork. Third, the second-order themes were consolidated in aggregate dimensions, which formed the basis of our emerging framework for entrepreneurial project execution. Also, this iterative nature of the coding process resulted in a gradual reduction in the volume of data to be analysed, giving a more focused, organised, and relevant data set from which clear theme categories and commonalities emerged. Throughout this process, coding decisions were validated through peer debriefing sessions involving all three authors to minimise interpretive bias and strengthen intersubjective reliability.

Findings

The findings validate Mbiru et al.'s (2020) entrepreneurial execution process in the EPM model. The results indicate that social enterprises followed the 'entrepreneurial execution processes,' which comprised all three important elements highlighted in the EPM model. The evidence from this study supports the shift from traditional project execution process to entrepreneurial execution processes in social enterprises. This shift to entrepreneurial project execution is strongly reinforced by project managers capabilities to: (a) recognise and explore opportunities, (b) be proactive in managing projects, and (c) manage project knowledge. The mastery of entrepreneurial project execution in social enterprises has profound implications for achieving the SDGs in rural Africa. These dynamic capabilities of project managers strengthen social enterprises resilience to improve their utility and spread of social interventions as well as supports sustainable development outcomes in alignment with the SDGs.

Opportunity recognition and exploration

Informants at all three levels of management reported various ways to seize new opportunities for enhancing project work advancement. The informants consistently reported approaching work execution processes with an entrepreneurial mindset whilst looking for new and improved ways of addressing work challenges as the corrective and

preventive measures to project failure. The informants indicated that the 'opportunity recognition' and 'exploration process' in project execution comprises three important components: (a) resource exploration, (b) volunteer knowledge, and (c) top leadership support. These issues are discussed below.

Resource exploration

The findings provided evidence for 'resource exploration' as an important element of the EPM 'opportunity recognition and exploration' processes (see Table 3). Informants at all levels of management demonstrated their dedication to optimising scarce resources to realise project deliverables. The constraints imposed by resource scarcity compelled them to explore available alternatives while maintaining a resolute focus on the attainment of project results and outcomes. The implementation of entrepreneurial execution processes provides social enterprises with an ecosystem to operate within collaborative partnerships, knowledge spillovers, resource prudence, diversification, and the pursuit of diverse resource alternatives. This was reflected across the six social enterprises, enabling shared talent pools. Furthermore, these processes empower organisations to channel their capabilities towards the achievement of project results by harnessing variance reduction mechanisms in the execution of their project operations. The findings underscore the strategic role of resource exploration in the overarching context of EPM and its implications for effective project execution.

Volunteer knowledge

Informants at all levels of management expressed the need to cope with the competitive market dynamics, exacerbated by the challenges of diminishing resource availability. The key informant's strategic response revolved around the exploration and mobilisation of previously untapped volunteer knowledge resources to facilitate the execution of project activities. Entrepreneurial execution processes, as observed, play a pivotal role in enabling organisations to harness the latent potential of 'volunteer knowledge', thereby proactively addressing resource constraints. In addition, the judicious application of 'volunteer knowledge' emerged as a valuable facet for facilitating the efficient and effective execution of project endeavours amidst resource scarcity and the inherent ambiguities in project operations. This dynamic utilisation of knowledge resources underscores the adaptive capacity of social enterprises in their pursuit of project success in challenging environments.

Top leadership support

The data highlighted the importance of senior management's role in embracing a long-term perspective for projects by seeking innovative avenues to optimise project team performance and deliver better results. The strong support and active involvement of top management play a pivotal role in nurturing team members' enthusiasm and motivation, contributing significantly to a positive project execution environment. In addition, project managers engaged with team members to establish project goals that leveraged their existing proficiencies while enhancing the team's skill sets. Entrepreneurial execution processes aid organisations in developing and investing in robust leadership, a crucial factor for achieving success in projects. EPM enables project managers to evaluate and embrace a forward-thinking and creative mindset, equipping them with the

Table 3 Entrepreneurial execution process findings – proactive project management

EPM execution process sub-theme	Categories	Management level	Representative quotes
Opportunity recognition and exploration	Resource exploration	Strategic level	<p>We work within an evidence-based environment... we purposely choose to interact with opinion leaders, experts, or professionals so we tap into their knowledge resource [Programs Manager, CRS].</p>
		Tactical level	<p>We normally have that background search. ... you don't just wait until a call is made. By the time they call, they have already explored alternatives to get this money out. So, we also have our own system we employ to ensure we succeed in getting project funding [Capacity Strengthening Lead, CRS].</p> <p>Yes, we might be driven by the targets, but also, we can't ignore opportunities which exist. We must explore and exploit resources out there to our advantage. Especially now on the business side, we thoroughly explore the market opportunities as much as possible. We do not tire ourselves and say ok we said we're going to sell 500 kg of honey this month and we've achieved that by 25th so we can relax. No! we further explore our potential, and this has also shaped our approach towards other charity project works [Head of Finance & HR, KUL].</p>
		Operational level	<p>It is one thing to have working objectives but it's also another thing to work hard to attract and seek opportunities, you must know your weakness to attract new opportunities that you may capitalise on for system growth and to have capacity enhancement to mitigate project threats [Project M&E Officer, CID].</p> <p>For most of the projects, we do our best to explore available opportunities to access required resources or else we can no longer continue relying on donors alone. For example, you might be running a project where you are not implementing any SLA-saving, lending activities. But this is an opportunity for your farmers where they have challenges in procuring inputs and money-related challenges for financing their agricultural business. So, here train farmers in agricultural entrepreneurship so, they can also go out there and explore their potential [Project Coordinator, VED].</p> <p>It's our duty to make sure staff are aware of... of the future context. We give them as much information to enable them to maximise available resources [Grant Manager, VED].</p>
Volunteer knowledge	Strategic level		<p>Once there is something new, that we never expected, we learn a lesson and we always seek better ways of overcoming challenges because this is a learning organisation, we tap into available learning programmes, and we cannot be highly effective if you are not open to learning and taking advantage of opportunities out there [Project Manager, KUL].</p> <p>...opportunity exploitation is reflected in our project deliverables for example we have sustained some projects for more than twenty years like we have taken advantage of several opportunities in terms of small projects grants ... the Commonwealth Scholarship program has been with us for twenty years [Project Manager, CRS].</p> <p>What helps me to implement changes in these projects, I analyse and explore available resources and opportunities - so I can make the necessary changes. But if I've noticed I can't change it, there are no resources; I don't need to trade it. I just let go, and I'll think, what next? [Project Manager, A2N].</p>
		<p>We are member to different consortiums, that normally organise training for their volunteer members ...we always try to participate because they bring in global experts who also volunteer to come and teach us contemporary practices [Head of Finance, KUL].</p> <p>We are open to learning all the time, we often send our staff and sometimes volunteer staff to upskill, and we take advantage of this free knowledge, we learned a lesson because you cannot run highly effective projects if you are not open to these learning avenues including learning from volunteer staff [Capacity Strengthening Lead, CRS].</p>	

Table 3 (continued)

EPM execution process sub-theme	Categories	Management level	Representative quotes
		<i>Tactical level</i>	It is a necessary evil to have common sense in project operations especially when working in this part of the world. So, if you know you are venturing into something you are not sure of, the only way you can do it better is by consulting colleagues and knowledge experts. We encourage our staff to borrow from each other if they are going to venture into something new, they can borrow others' experience and people often volunteer their time to help [Programs Manager, A2N].
		<i>Operational level</i>	...most of our project operations are supported by the country program with about 30 volunteer staff who are recruited globally. These are not like really volunteers in the sense of what you know. These are people providing consultancy... they come in as consultants for two weeks [Project Manager, CRS]. We embrace learning opportunities from volunteers, we are good at it, we have accumulated a good wealth of lessons learned repository from it... [Project Manager, KUL].
	Top leadership support	<i>Strategic level</i>	Whenever opportunities linked to project growth are realised, top management calls for a meeting to explore such opportunities. So, they will deliberate about seizing such opportunities for the benefit of the organisation ...that is our approach with some of these projects [Senior Programs Officer, SOC]. The main drivers for the quality of our work are based on our leadership competence to support and recognise serious stakeholders to deliver what we agree on. So, we make sure that field workers are trained to deliver programs that impact the farmers. Even at the farmer level, we have established leadership committees, so the individual farmers monitor and encourage each other to perform better [Executive Director, A2N].
		<i>Tactical level</i>	It is one thing to have the set objectives but it's also another for top leaders to support and work hard with the project team to attract other opportunities that enable the project to realise its intended objectives, you must know your weaknesses to attract opportunities and to have capacity enhancement to also mitigate the threats [Project M&E Officer, CID]. What project managers need to realise is the capacity embedded in the people around them. That is critical – understanding that people around you have different capacities and talents. Once managers realise that then they will flourish. There is a need for organisations to embrace and use the capabilities for example, managers can develop new project proposals based on information obtained from people around them [Project Coordinator, VED].
		<i>Operational level</i>	One thing I normally share with my staff is that it's only when we people pretending to be in big offices and positions come down to support our juniors to manage the project constraints effectively, that we can able to deliver the project benefits [Project Manager, VED]. ... we seize top management support. If you want such a project to succeed in another district or area where there are government restrictions, then what can you do unless you have the backup of senior leadership? [Community Development Officer, SOC].

Organisation names have been coded to retain anonymity, NGO – Non-Government Organisation

Other information sources include organisations' websites, program manuals, and annual reports.

necessary tools to guide and support their project teams effectively. This approach not only fosters a culture of innovation and efficiency but also aligns project activities with the broader organisational vision, ultimately enhancing project outcomes and organisational competitiveness.

Proactive project management

Informants at all levels of management reported their practice of proactively strategizing before project execution. This pre-execution planning involved a thorough evaluation of risks and a comprehensive examination of both the project's holistic perspective and its components. Informants indicated that enabling the 'proactive project management' approach in the 'work execution' process comprises two important components: (a) managerial foresight and (b) scope creep management (see Table 4).

Managerial foresight

The data highlight the pivotal role of 'managerial foresight' in formulating precise operational forecasts pertinent to the feasibility of projects within the realm of social enterprises. The informants noted the importance of leveraging 'managerial foresight' as a driving force behind cultivating team members' enthusiasm and motivation, thereby fostering project success. Entrepreneurial execution processes, which encompass the capability to scrutinise current project contingencies and anticipate the desired future project state, were found to be instrumental by informants at all levels of management. In addition, the practice of managerial anticipation played a central role in assisting project managers to identify and employ contingency strategies throughout the project execution phase. The findings underscore the critical importance of 'managerial foresight' and its interplay with the broader entrepreneurial execution processes, shedding light on their synergistic effects on project success and management within African social enterprises.

Scope creep management

Informants underscored the prime significance of executing project tasks in strict adherence to the predefined scope plan. This emphasis was aimed at mitigating inefficiencies in resource allocation and utilisation. The informants highlighted the necessity of conducting projects strictly within the established scope parameters to address resource scarcities effectively, whilst stressing the imperative of exercising frugality in managing both project budgets and available resources. Entrepreneurial execution processes offer organisations the advantage of meticulously considering the comprehensive components delineated in the project scope statement. Entrepreneurial execution further enables project managers to provide an explicit definition of the tasks that will be performed and those that are explicitly excluded from the project's horizon. This strategic approach to execution facilitates a more robust and precise management of project resources, ultimately enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of project results and outcomes.

Managing project knowledge

The process of harnessing existing project knowledge and creating new knowledge to achieve project objectives and contribute to organisational learning (manage project knowledge) was reported by informants at all levels of management. The informants reported their engagement in taking up learning opportunities to build their knowledge and skills gap for the successful implementation of project activities. They indicated that enabling the effective management of project knowledge in the work execution processes comprises three important components: (a) knowledge creation, (b) knowledge utilisation and (c) knowledge storage (see Table 5).

Table 4 Entrepreneurial execution process findings – proactive project management

EPM execution process sub-theme	Categories	Management level	Representative quotes
Proactive project management	Managerial foresight	<i>Strategic level</i>	<p>I'm very proactive in the sense that I often foresee project outcomes. For example, I have told you that we have different groups... now, our beneficiaries are organising what we call primary cooperatives. However, we have noted that some of these cooperatives are doing better than others. Now, for those that are not performing well, we have identified the likely causes we have noted for example, leadership at these co-operatives is a critical challenge. We must incorporate activities addressing leadership skills [Senior Programs Officer, CID].</p> <p>You must put on lenses that enable you to foresee the project's future direction because if you plan to do something and the farmers are not in support, you have wasted your time. We do capacity-building training during the dry season ...and on-farm training during the rainy season because you want to take them through practical agronomy training during the sowing season [Executive Director, A2N].</p> <p>I'm proactive ...you know the staff, their performance in many cases depends on the leadership. The way you manage them and the way you try to show them what you want to achieve in future is the way they also approach work both at the individual and group level [Project Coordinator, A2N].</p>
		<i>Tactical level</i>	<p>I am driven by my reputation and legacy once I am out of CRS. I have learned to be competitive ... and therefore the quality of my work must speak for itself. I am proactive in my style. Sometimes it's not even about the money they pay me here, or it's not about the level of authority, but if it is about authoring a report ... can I write a report that stands out, that everyone else there would be asking, hey who wrote this report [Programs Manager, CRS].</p> <p>I have experience in predicting projects' likely outcomes. I have dealt with different people from different backgrounds and attitudes, you know attitudes and moods are important factors in project management, people are not the same, people have different attitudes for instance, a team member can carry on a problem he has at home to work, but you can study his behaviour pattern and you see how you will approach him. But of course, experience is the best teacher [Project Coordinator, A2N].</p> <p>... I'm a very enterprising manager, my style of management is based on solving issues as they keep arising. I would like to be considered entrepreneurial-driven. I like leading with an entrepreneurial style of management [Programs Manager, SOC].</p>
		<i>Operational level</i>	<p>My management style is proactive. I want to involve my team in diverse idea gathering. If you involve the staff, they develop trust in you, they cannot hide information because everything will be transparent, and honestly, my team does appreciate it because we share a lot. We're able to foresee challenges and adjust accordingly to reduce risk impact [Project Manager, A2N].</p> <p>If you want a change in the system, the change should start with you. I'm not saying I'm the best manager. No, but I do what I'm supposed to do. I am a person of integrity and very proactive in my approach to work. There are certain things which are obvious like being exemplary or even servant or self-leadership [Project Manager, KUL].</p>
	Scope creep management	<i>Strategic level</i>	<p>Well, each member of the team is responsible, you see the finance and administrative manager, a project coordinator, and the logistics officer, so everybody participates in managing the risks to ensure we work within the planned scope of work [Executive Director, A2N].</p>

Table 4 (continued)

EPM execu- tion process sub-theme	Categories	Man- age- ment level	Representative quotes
			<p>I manage unplanned changes depending on the prevailing circumstances, I will share the recent one. We had a model district, which is Kasese, and the USAID asked us to expand our services in the district but without additional financial support and as a management decision, we said no ...it is out of scope. My chief of party didn't want the idea, but there was nothing we could do [Senior Program Officer, CID].</p> <p>We do have operational procedures or manuals, and, in the manuals, we stipulate the scope control procedures, and we are extremely strict on that. If for example, a project manager is going to visit stakeholders in Nakasongola we indicate what she must do. We already have a scope management plan for all projects here [Country Project Director, CRS].</p>
		<i>Tactical level</i>	<p>With monitoring – the intention is to support project teams not to stray off the planned scope because this will constrain project resources. It is very rigorous that you must keep your eyes and ears to the ground to be sure that the work quality and quantity correspond to the intended. [Project M&E Officer, CID].</p> <p>I often sit with the operations manager, ...we do not take on any activity outside the workplan. ...do we have enough money to execute all these activities we have budgeted I mean we have planned for [Centre Manager, KUL].</p> <p>...often, we have a trajectory of where things are going and we check constantly so we are within the intended scope [Program Manager, SOC].</p>
		<i>Operational level</i>	<p>As a manager, I need to know what is happening in the field to ensure staff do not go over or underboard. We work within the planned work scope and budget. I trust my team, I know they do good work, and they really give it their all, but it is my responsibility to ensure they work based on the scope. [Community Development Officer, SOC].</p> <p>I don't work alone. I involve everybody - so that's how I can describe my work approach. We are directed by the work scope plan, so we do not mess up. If you don't involve staff, they will not have a clear idea of the scope of work [Project Manager, A2N].</p>

Organisation names have been coded to retain anonymity, NGO – Non-Government Organisation

Other information sources include organisations' websites, program manuals, and annual reports.

Knowledge creation

Informants emphasised their active involvement in developing new project management concepts, which provide a foundational step in devising innovative methodologies and techniques. They expressed an appreciation for the wealth of indigenous knowledge, recognising its pivotal role in streamlining project management processes. This dual emphasis on novel knowledge creation and the preservation of traditional indigenous wisdom underscores the significance of knowledge in enhancing project management practices within the context of entrepreneurial execution processes. Entrepreneurial execution processes enable organisations to leverage knowledge created by individuals to improve project outcomes, This, in turn, serves to reinforce the broader project management framework, establishing a tangible link between contemporary project practices and pre-existing knowledge repositories, further strengthening the organisation's

Table 5 Entrepreneurial execution process findings – manage project knowledge

EPM execution process sub-theme	Categories	Management level	Representative quotes
Manage project knowledge	Knowledge creation	<i>Strategic level</i>	<p>We have what we call 'Host capacity building development plan'. It is the platform that we developed with the stakeholders indicating how we are going to support knowledge generation. We call it a living document because at any given time, it can change, and you can add, or you can subtract information [Country Project Director, CRS].</p> <p>Indigenous knowledge is growing as an important source of knowledge and information base for our operations, it is also important to benefit from traditional science. You are fusing scientific ideas with indigenous knowledge to improve individual understanding of effective systems [Executive Director, A2N].</p> <p>With knowledge, ...idea sharing amongst you and experienced farmers is very important such that you can also learn the local ways of implementing project tasks, but we should also take it beyond that and face that community, involve that community and the methodologies and strategies resulting into effective project delivery, we got to fine-tune the project approach together [Capacity Strengthening Lead, CRS].</p>
		<i>Tactical level</i>	<p>The practice here is that for any new project, a staff is given a project document or protocol and on top of that project document, you are given a copy of the strategic plan. So, whatever you do has to be in line with the project document and the strategic plan. Some documents come from project sponsors – some of the documents are considered classified to avoid duplication and information theft [Project Coordinator, A2N].</p> <p>Staff do progress reports, we also have an IMS (Information Management System) where staff have templates, they make their monthly, quarterly, and annual reports with recommendations. There is room for sharing experiences and we unanimously agree on the best alternatives including adjusting in plans [Project M&E Officer, CID].</p>
		<i>Operational level</i>	<p>We document the facts related to project success and we usually share in the closed-door high-level meetings to be able to qualify the evidence as an organisation's process asset [Project Coordinator, VED].</p> <p>... they keep refreshing our skills internally through in-house training, sometimes they send us to Uganda Management Institute. They ensure we are knowledgeable to implement project work. They organise seminar days once the Human Resource identifies a skills gap in the team, she outsources for a facilitator who then takes them through maybe a week's training to equip them with project management knowledge [Community Development Officer, SOC].</p>
		<i>Strategic level</i>	<p>I'm training five stakeholder groups. I submit reports to the project coordinator. I put the challenges which I face in the field but also, the lessons learned in the reports can help you improve. We review all suggestions and that has helped us to improve [Project Manager A2N].</p>
Knowledge utilisation	Knowledge utilisation	<i>Strategic level</i>	<p>We have online material accessed on PROLINNOVA website but it's also on KUL website. We have uploaded important information for both external and internal usage. So, this is the innovation I'm talking about especially climate change adaptation and mitigation for Uganda policy and practice recommendations. We equally give advice or recommend policies to government entities [Executive Director, KUL].</p>
		<i>Tactical level</i>	<p>...staff have enrolled in courses which equip them with key project management skills like issues around delegation, supervision, how you plan out your work, how you lead a team, how to motivate a team and how to ensure that people are performing the monitoring skills [Project Manager SOC].</p> <p>We make use of the traditional knowledge and experience. But also, you cannot implement a project in isolation from other partners. We aim at exceeding stakeholder expectations as well as meeting ours. So, in case there are relevant documents or guidelines from our partners, we adopt them [Partnership Networking & Training Lead, KUL].</p>

Table 5 (continued)

EPM execu- tion process sub-theme	Categories	Man- age- ment level	Representative quotes
			The board approves our annual operation manual in line with the budget for our foot soldiers or the field extension officers to use as a guide [Executive Director, A2N].
		<i>Opera- tional level</i>	If I train you for a skill, I should also learn from your approach. It's a two-way... , a win-win situation so that all of us merge that knowledge and say okay, this is the right approach, this can push us far [Operations Manager, SOC].
			We send staff for training; we facilitate knowledge accumulation. So, we normally rely on a lot of such trainings when implementing projects [Project Manager A2N].
	Knowledge storage	<i>Strat- egic level</i>	We generated databases so that we store all project information online. It is a genuine database. It's not an Excel sheet. So, every data collected e.g., number of people saving, work approaches, project reports – is stored in the system, the lead person who built it is based in South Africa [Capacity Strengthening Lead, CRS].
			All unplanned changes must be documented so we are able to justify to our partner that we shifted money, or we added money to any other activities. We wouldn't be able to explain. We document everything for any change that is made [Program Manager, SOC].
		<i>Tacti- cal level</i>	When we know that change is going to help the project, we ensure that any change configuration is documented for future planning and use. There is room to document any change for the better running of the project, there is room for that flexibility, and we have always documented this as a success story. We have always included unplanned changes in our reports. We have activity reports, we have monthly reports, and we also document daily [Project Coordinator, A2N].
			With managerial work, documentation is important. If you resign, someone taking over from you should know how things were before you left. That is book knowledge, but you will never know when the system outsmarts you. So, you don't leave anything for granted, like for me, I do document [Project M&E Officer, CID].
		<i>Opera- tional level</i>	We document each project activity and that is critical to our success. We have always included unplanned changes in our reports. Like we have operational reports, procedures, and manuals [Operations Manager, SOC]. We regularly do quality checks, – it is a must to document all the best practices and the challenges that give us that avenue to identify what to redress or the strategic direction we need to take [Community Development Officer, SOC].

Organisation names have been coded to retain anonymity, NGO – Non-Government Organisation

Other information sources include organisations' websites, program manuals, and annual reports.

capacity to make informed, data-driven decisions and optimise project management processes.

Knowledge utilisation

The informants at all levels of management underscored the important relationship between 'knowledge utilisation' and the innovative trajectory within the realm of business operations. This linkage proved instrumental in inspiring the development and refinement of innovative project management techniques and procedures. Entrepreneurial execution processes facilitate 'knowledge utilisation' by enabling managers to access real-time, current information, which is essential and a fundamental requirement for making effective decisions in the pursuit of project task execution. The study found that this fusion of entrepreneurial execution processes and the effective utilisation

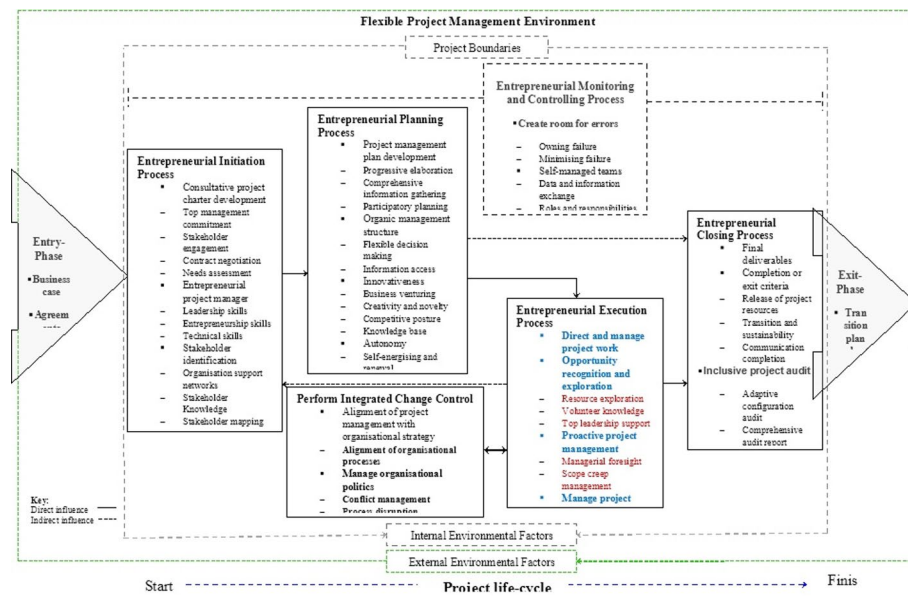


Fig. 2 EPM model for social enterprises in a developing economy context

of knowledge resources serve as a potent catalyst, fostering dynamic project management approaches responsive to the rapidly evolving business landscape. The findings provide valuable insights into the critical role of knowledge usage in promoting innovation within social enterprises and contribute to the ongoing discourse in entrepreneurial project management.

Knowledge storage

The findings emphasised the significance of maintaining a comprehensive knowledge repository, comprising both electronic and hardcopy formats, at both the individual and organisational levels. Such a knowledge repository proved essential for expeditious retrieval and application in the social enterprise project execution. Entrepreneurial execution processes facilitate organisations to store important project documents to create value and meet operational, tactical, and strategic project requirements. Integrating an effective knowledge storage system, supported by artificial intelligence advancements, empowered project managers to capitalise on existing knowledge, thus promoting innovative project execution solutions and ideas. This system also improved knowledge accessibility, enhancing the social enterprises' decision-making process for more effective and efficient project execution.

Discussion

The findings highlight a nuanced entrepreneurial execution process shaped by essential dynamic capabilities around proactiveness, opportunity exploration and project knowledge management. These findings strongly align with the entrepreneurial execution process elements of the EPM process model (see Fig. 2). Beyond the validation of the execution element of the EPM model, the findings underscore the need for project managers in social enterprises to build essential dynamic capabilities around proactiveness, opportunity exploration and project knowledge management. Social enterprises in African operate in environments characterised by resource scarcity, high uncertainty,

institutional gaps and rapidly changing socio-economic conditions (Farhoud et al., 2023; Mbiru et al., 2024). Accordingly, these capabilities are strategic for social enterprise survival and long-term social value creation, which contribute to sustainable development outcomes, particularly across the triple bottom-line (social, economic, and environmental) in rural Africa.

Opportunity recognition and exploration

The socio-economic environment in SSA is overwhelmed with several unmet needs ranging from agriculture to clean energy, environmental degradation and climate action, food security, education, health and housing (Farhoud et al. 2023; Ika et al. 2020b). Therefore, opportunity-oriented project managers in social enterprises can be able to leverage such dynamic capabilities to generate transformative ideas and mobilise innovative local solutions to address pressing economic, social and environmental needs. Opportunity-seeking behaviour can potentially assist project managers to be able to recognise where a project can be replicated or expanded in other underserved communities. Primarily, resource exploitation, volunteer knowledge, and top leadership support enabled social enterprises to recognise and exploit emerging opportunities and translate them into long-term social value creation that align with the SDGs (Kassim et al., 2020). This form of empirical execution reflects the exploratory learning configuration (Kang et al., 2007), where action precedes full information, and iteration is embraced as a norm. Entrepreneurial project managers need to adopt innovative and proactive strategies that mitigate constraints and actively transform such opportunities into long-term social value creation (Raisch et al., 2009). Resource exploration relies on pioneering managerial innovations whilst leveraging emerging capabilities and opportunities to achieve strategic business objectives (Ika & Donnelly, 2017) as well as the SDGs. This aligns with the concept of organisational ambidexterity, where exploration and exploitation are essential for strategic project execution (Smara, 2025). Leveraging volunteer knowledge and informal networks to implement projects swiftly and flexibly denote strategic opportunity exploitation by agile structures and values-driven decision-making. It also underscores the importance of tailoring project staff resource systems and practices to match the constraining social enterprise environment in which they are applied (Medcof & Song, 2013). Engaging volunteer knowledge resources in project management improves organisational resource utilisation (i.e., efficiency), goal attainment (i.e., effectiveness) and competitiveness amidst resource scarcity and complexities in project delivery. These internal organisational resources support social enterprises to solve pressing community problems, build community capabilities and provide intergenerational benefits. The capacity to translate these organisational resources into social enterprises long-term social value creation are central to the achievement of the SDGs in Africa (Manioudis & Meramveliotakis, 2022).

Resource exploration can be facilitated by cross-sector alliances and senior management support as they enable social enterprises to function despite continuing underfunding and align with extant research that emphasises the role of strategic alliances in enhancing project outcomes through shared knowledge and capabilities (Urban et al., 2024). These partnerships are examples of strategic bricolage, where organisations craft solutions from limited means (Liu et al., 2021). Moreover, senior executive support acts as a catalyst for opportunity recognition when venturing into new business domains

(Gans et al., 2019) by facilitating partnerships, unlocking donor relationships, and motivating project managers to optimise organisational resources to build sustainable capability of social enterprises. This leadership role reinforces the importance of organisational resource systems tailored to the constraining realities of the operating environment (Medcof & Song, 2013), whilst helping build sustainable capability development supporting entrepreneurial project execution under uncertainty.

Proactive project management

Across SSA, social enterprise ecosystems such as markets, regulatory structures, infrastructure and funding are becoming less predictable over time (Osabohien et al., 2024). Therefore, in resource constraint context like Uganda, proactive behaviour of project managers can help to secure alternative funding, form new strategic alliances, and redesign project activities to respond swiftly to economic, social and environmental changes. Proactiveness urges pre-emptive risk management, adaptability to environmental and funding shocks which is necessary in project environment where political and economic shocks are a common occurrence (Mbiru et al., 2024). The study reinforces the critical role of proactive project management as an operational strength of social enterprises by underscoring the importance of strategic foresight, flexibility, and scope creep management (Akinboade et al., 2021). Managerial foresight allows project managers to use situational analysis and experience to anticipate disruptions and respond effectively (Amsteus, 2014). Managerial foresight is reflected in strategic planning and can be embedded in local knowledge, intuition, and community responsiveness (Mbiru et al., 2023). Proactiveness promotes value creation in project teams' creativity and innovative capabilities when handling project challenges (Fangel, 2018). Managerial foresight is reflected in the project manager's behaviour of analysing the present situation, projecting future desired situations, whilst bringing forth the necessary course of action in alignment with local development trajectories. Whilst antecedents of judgement and decision-making may characterise project managers' performance, managerial foresight offers valuable opportunities to enhance project decision-making processes (Ika & Donnelly, 2017).

Organisations must establish clear KPIs and scope control mechanisms to avoid mission drift or premature project termination (Tereso et al., 2018). Scope creep represents unauthorised changes that may sidle into a project scope because of instructions that have been issued without realising the magnitude of the transformation (PMI, 2021). Entrepreneurial project managers' focus on scope change is an inevitable reality. Managing scope change is essential because it can have an undesirable impact on outcomes and may compel premature project execution cancellation (Tereso et al., 2018). Entrepreneurial organisations must have an effective scope change control mechanism by putting in place 'trigger points' (signalling points) in the scope planning phase. These entrepreneurial capabilities can help project managers to strength risk mitigation over time and adaptability to environmental and funding shocks.

Managing project knowledge

In SSA, social enterprises operate in environments where project management knowledge is sometimes lost or fragmented due to the lack of proper administrative systems and frequent staff turnovers (Diaz Gonzalez et al., 2021). Hence, strong project

knowledge management capabilities enable project managers to strengthen institutional memory to ensure continuity and allows project teams to avoid replicating mistakes. A well-organized knowledge management system builds long-term institutional capacity beyond individual projects and ensures that limited resources are efficiently used to generate long-term social value. The relationship between managing project knowledge and ensuring the sustainability of social enterprise operations is a pivotal and ever-evolving challenge (Meramveliotakis & Manioudis, 2021). In the Ugandan context, where formalised systems may be lacking, project knowledge management is not only a technical asset but a strategic enabler of adaptability, continuity, and sustainable capability development (Mbiru et al., 2024). Maylor and Turner (2017) argued that robust project knowledge management strategies are fundamental to community empowerment and local capacity building beyond individual projects. The ability to create, store, and use knowledge is instrumental in supporting entrepreneurial execution and as a key resource for achieving sustainable competitiveness (de Nadae & de Carvalho, 2017). The value of 'knowledge creation', 'knowledge utilisation', and 'knowledge storage' are important domains relevant to managing project knowledge within social enterprises. Knowledge creation in social enterprises is developed through knowledge databases, documented experiences and best practices to improve business processes (Ajmal et al., 2010). Successful organisations benefit from documented knowledge and experiences, and knowledge utilisation. The use of knowledge, particularly tacit knowledge embedded in team experiences, is a recurring characteristic of entrepreneurial project execution success.

Knowledge utilisation enables organisations to improve their business processes, make financial savings, generate greater revenue, enhance user acceptance, and/or increase competitiveness (de Nadae & de Carvalho, 2017), thereby increasing social enterprise resilience in the face of external shocks. Managing knowledge is a support function and a core project execution competency within entrepreneurial project management (Granados et al., 2017). In resource-constrained settings, knowledge management practices, though often informal and frugal, serve a critical infrastructure for sustaining social enterprise operations, enabling innovation, embedded learning and sustainable capability development (Sheik et al., 2022). In recent times, entrepreneurial organisations are transforming their project's tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through visualisation and integrating such knowledge into everyday operational practices through a well-structured knowledge sharing framework (Mbiru et al., 2024).

The path to sustainable development in rural Africa

Recent studies demonstrate that when social enterprises build strong local capabilities in entrepreneurial project execution such as planning, risk management, innovation, resource mobilisation, knowledge management and implementation, their influence on the achievement of the SDGs is considerably reinforced (Kassim et al., 2020; Picciotti, 2017). Studies in Uganda suggest that social enterprises have played a fundamental role in helping to alleviate poverty, promote access to education, gender equality and create decent jobs (Mbiru et al., 2024), all of which are central to the achievement of the SDGs by 2030. Accordingly, the path to building sustainable social enterprises in Africa needs an integrated approach that addresses institutional constraints whilst leveraging internal organisational dynamic capabilities (Imanuella et al., 2025; Kruse et al., 2025) to strengthen their operational resilience.

In SSA, social enterprises are increasingly considered as promising agents in achieving sustainable development by tackling poverty, youth unemployment, agricultural inefficiency, environmental degradation, and limited access to essential social services (Shah et al., 2019). In East Africa, for instance, where over 70% of the population lives in rural areas and formal job opportunities are scarce, social enterprises offer significant potential for unlocking grassroots solutions to youth unemployment and poverty (Esau et al., 2022; Wanyoike et al., 2021). However, their long-term sustainability remains uncertain, hindered by dwindling foreign aid and limited funding options combined with a challenging social enterprise ecosystem. This is where, project managers can leverage internal organisational capability to generate solutions that are scalable, cost-effective and locally adapted, accelerating project execution efficiency and as a mechanism for sustainable development in rural Africa.

Social enterprises in Africa must adopt context-relevant mission-driven business models that balance long-term social value creation with profitability. However, the route to long-term social value creation begins with the identification of community-focused problems, ensuring that projects initiated by social enterprises reflect local development needs and community priorities (Chigunta, 2019; Lorenzo-Afable et al., 2020). When these local development needs and priorities are aligned with the SDGs, social enterprises become influential drivers of building community resilience, inclusive development and socio-economic transformation (Juma et al., 2017; Turyakira et al., 2025).

Sustainable social enterprises thrive on continuous project knowledge management and organisational learning through adaptation to market dynamics that suite the changing environmental and economic circumstances (Osabutey et al., 2024). This is where knowledge creation, storage and utilisation as well as volunteer knowledge mobilisation and leadership support contribute to learning continuity, institutional memory, and local capacity building beyond individual projects (Meramveliotakis & Manioudis, 2012). Supporting social enterprise resilience and sustainable capability development through project managers proactiveness in building local capacity, and multi-stakeholder collaboration with local governments and development agencies are essential to align with local development trajectories and priorities of development partners (Islam et al., 2025). This will enhance the capacity of social enterprises to deliver sustainable and local-based innovative solutions, thereby accelerating rural Africa's transition toward sustainable development (Ng & Lukeš, 2025).

Conclusion

Although grounded in the context of social enterprises operating in Uganda, the findings corroborate PM literature and contribute to the refinement of our understanding regarding the critical components underpinning entrepreneurial project execution process. These understanding can be delineated into three primary facets. First, the opportunity recognition and exploration as a mechanism to navigate resource scarcity and dive into the project's unknown potential to create long-term social value in support of sustainable development in rural Africa. Second, proactiveness in PM that encompasses adaptability and responsiveness to changes within the project environment strengthen risk mitigation and adaptability to funding shocks. Thirdly, managing project knowledge to support learning continuity, institutional memory and local capacity building beyond individual projects has the potential to enhance execution efficiency.

This paper highlights practical opportunities for social enterprises in SSA to strengthen their dynamic capability around proactiveness, opportunity exploration and project knowledge management to scale up current and future project outcomes in alignment with the SDGs. When project execution is responsive to sudden shifts in community needs, it creates a more inclusive and resilient development pathways. However, social enterprises will require supportive social entrepreneurship ecosystems and innovative approaches to scale up and accelerate their service delivery to help African governments achieve sustainable development.

Directions for future research

This study advances the EPM framework by refining constructs, identifying boundary conditions, and demonstrating how project execution process operate differently in resource-constrained social enterprise contexts compared to prior studies mostly in Western countries. However, future studies would benefit from deeper analytical interrogation of tensions, trade-offs, or contradictions within the data. For example, while volunteer knowledge and informal practices are presented as strengths, potential risks related to accountability, sustainability, and scalability were not sufficiently examined in our study. Similarly, the reliance on top leadership support is highlighted positively, but the implications for organisational dependency or leadership succession are not discussed. These are interesting and potential areas for further research to enrich the literature in developing economies where the project environment is complex and challenging.

Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

Authors' contributions

1st Author formulated the main research idea, design the methods and collected and wrote the original draft. 2nd author wrote the original draft, reviewed and edited and supervised the research. 3rd author reviewed and edited and supervised the research.

Funding

Open Access funding enabled and organized by CAUL and its Member Institutions. This project did not received funding.

Data availability

Data will be made available upon request.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This project received ethics approval: H0016094.

Consent for publication

The case study organizations and participants have provided consent for the publication of the information received.

Competing interests

There is no conflict of interest.

Received: 15 January 2026 / Accepted: 21 March 2026

Published online: 11 April 2026

References

- Ajmal, M., Helo, P., & Kekale, T. (2010). Critical factors for knowledge management in project business. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 14(1), 56–168.
- Akinboade, O. O. A., Taft, T., Weber, J. F., Manoko, O. B., & Molobi, V. S. (2021). How the social entrepreneurship business model designs in South Africa create value: A complex adaptive systems approach. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, ahead of print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEEE-02-2021-0057>
- Amsteus, M. (2014). Subjective performance, managerial foresight, and objective performance. *Strategic Change*, 23(3–4), 133–146.

- Andriopoulos, C., & Lewis, M. W. (2009). Exploitation-exploration tensions and organisational ambidexterity: managing paradoxes of innovation. *Organisation Science*, 20(4), 696–717.
- Chigunta, F. (2019). Ubuntu philosophy as a tool for preventing and addressing youth delinquency in African societies. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 31(3), 277–283.
- de Nadae, J., & de Carvalho, M. M. (2017). A knowledge management perspective of the project management office. *Brazilian Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 14(3), 350–362.
- Diaz Gonzalez, A., & Dentchev, N. A. (2021). Ecosystems in support of social entrepreneurs: a literature review. *Social Enterprise Journal*, 17(3), 329–360.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (2021). What is the Eisenhardt Method. *really? Strategic Organization*, 19(1), 147–160.
- Esau, H. O., & Tengeh, R. K. (2022). Key success factors for scaling social enterprises in South Africa. *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues*, 9(4), 396–415.
- Fangel, M. (2018). *Proactive Project Management* (2nd ed.). Van Haren Publishing.
- Farhoud, M., Bignotti, A., Hamann, R., Kauami, N. C., Kiconco, M., Ghalwash, S., De Beule, F., Tladi, B., Matomela, S., & Kgaphola, M. (2023). African perspectives on researching social entrepreneurship. *Social Enterprise Journal*, 19(5), 421–434.
- Fewings, P., & Henjewe, C. (2019). *Construction Project Management: An Integrated Approach*. Routledge.
- Fonrouge, C., Bredillet, C., & Fouché, C. (2019). Entrepreneurship and project management relationships: So far so good? Dialogic conversation and Luhmannian perspective. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 12(1), 6–24.
- Gans, J. S., Stern, S., & Wu, J. (2019). Foundations of entrepreneurial strategy. *Strategic Management Journal*, 40(5), 736–756.
- Gasik, S. (2011). A model of project knowledge management. *Project Management Journal*, 42(3), 23–44.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15–31.
- Gladden, R. (2009). Organisational learning: how companies and institutions manage and apply knowledge. *Project Management Journal*, 40(4), 106–106.
- Granados, M. L., Mohamed, S., & Hlupic, V. (2017). Knowledge management activities in social enterprises: lessons for small and non-profit firms. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 21(2), 376–396.
- Ika, L. A., & Donnelly, J. (2017). Success conditions for international development capacity building projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 35(1), 44–63.
- Ika, L. A., Söderlund, J., Munro, L. T., & Landoni, P. (2020a). Cross-learning between project management and international development: analysis and research agenda. *International Journal of Project Management*, 38(8), 548–558.
- Ika, L. A., Söderlund, J., Munro, L. T., & Landoni, P. (2020b). When project management meets international development, what can we learn. *International Journal of Project Management*, 38(8), 469–473.
- Imanuella, S. F., Idris, A., & Kamaruddin, N. (2025). Social entrepreneurship and rural development in post-independence Indonesia. *Social Enterprise Journal*, 21(1), 46–66.
- Islam, A., Islam, M. A., Hossain, M. I., Nimfa, D. T., & Tehseen, S. (2025). Paradox of sustainable growth: the interplay between small and medium enterprises and non-governmental organizations and government Helix. *Business Strategy & Development*, 8(1), e70054.
- Jeong, S., Bailey, J. M., Lee, J., & McLean, G. N. (2020). It's not about me, it's about us: a narrative inquiry on living life as a social entrepreneur. *Social Enterprise Journal*, 16(3), 263–280.
- Juma, N. A., James, C. D., & Kwesiga, E. (2017). Sustainable entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa: the collaborative multi-system model. *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship*, 29(3), 211–235.
- Kang, S.-C., Morris, S. S., & Snell, S. A. (2007). Relational archetypes, organizational learning, and value creation: extending the human resource architecture. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(1), 236–256.
- Kassim, E. S., Tajimi, T. A. M., Hairuddin, H., Md Ab Malik, A., & Tobii, S. U. M. (2020). Mapping social enterprise to sustainable development goals. *International Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development*, 19(2), 209–237.
- Kerzner, H. (2022). *Project Management Case Studies*. John Wiley & Sons: New Jersey.
- Kruse, P., Chipeta, E. M., Surujlal, J., & Wegge, J. (2025). Development and validation of a new social entrepreneurial intention scale in South Africa and Germany. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 16(2), 647–673.
- Littlewood, D., & Holt, D. (2015). Social and environmental enterprises in Africa: context, convergence and characteristics. In *The Business of Social & Environmental Innovation*, Springer, pp. 27–47.
- Littlewood, D., & Holt, D. (2018). Social enterprise resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Business Strategy & Development*, 1(1), 53–63.
- Liu, W., Kwong, C. C., Kim, Y.-A., & Liu, H. (2021). The more the better vs. less is more: strategic alliances, bricolage and social performance in social enterprises. *Journal of Business Research*, 137, 128–142.
- Lorenzo-Afable, D., Lips-Wiersma, M., & Singh, S. (2020). Social value creation as care: the perspective of beneficiaries in social entrepreneurship. *Social Enterprise Journal*, 16(3), 339–360.
- Manioudis, M., & Meramvliotakis, G. (2022). Broad strokes towards a grand theory in the analysis of sustainable development: a return to the classical political economy. *New Political Economy*, 27(5), 866–878.
- Maylor, H., & Turner, N. (2017). Understand, reduce, respond: project complexity management theory and practice. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 37(8), 1076–1093.
- Mbiro, J., Wickham, M., & Ayentimi, D. T. (2020). Introducing an entrepreneurial project management model. *The Journal of Modern Project Management*, 7(4), 1–21.
- Mbiro, J. E., Ayentimi, D. T., & Wickham, M. (2023). Does entrepreneurial project monitoring and controlling process matter in social enterprises? Evidence from a developing African country. *International Journal of Project Management*, 41, 102435.
- Mbiro, J. E., Wickham, M., & Ayentimi, D. T. (2024). Entrepreneurial project initiation processes for social enterprises in a developing economy context. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 15(1), 1–27.
- Medcof, J. W., & Song, L. J. (2013). Exploration, exploitation and human resource management practices in cooperative and entrepreneurial HR configurations. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(15), 2911–2926.
- Meramvliotakis, G., & Manioudis, M. (2021). History, knowledge, and sustainable economic development: the contribution of John Stuart Mill's grand stage theory. *Sustainability*, 13(3), 1468.
- Mogotsi, K. S., & Baron, N. (2025). Local solutions for local problems: the contributions of social enterprises to resilient urban communities in South Africa. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 11(1), 2474187.
- Muma, S. L., Naidoo, K. S., & Hansraj, R. (2024). Perceived impacts of social enterprises in scaling effective refractive error coverage in Kenya. *Social Enterprise Journal*, 20(1), 91–110.

- Ng, J., & Lukeš, M. (2025). Creating and capturing value towards organizational sustainability: a strategic framework and pathways for social enterprises. *Review Managerial Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-025-00942-6>
- Niemann, C. C., Mai, R., & Dickel, P. (2022). Nurture or nature? How organizational and individual factors drive corporate entrepreneurial projects. *Journal of Business Research*, 140, 155–169.
- Osabohien, R., Worgwu, H., & Al-Faryan, M. A. S. (2024). Mentorship and innovation as drivers of entrepreneurship performance in Africa's largest economy. *Social Enterprise Journal*, 20(1), 76–90.
- Osabutey, E. L., & Jackson, T. (2024). Mobile money and financial inclusion in Africa: emerging themes, challenges and policy implications. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 202, 123339.
- Pavez, I., Gómez, H., Lalié, L., & González, V. A. (2021). Project team resilience: the effect of group potency and interpersonal trust. *International Journal of Project Management*, 39(6), 697–708.
- Picciotti, A. (2017). Towards sustainability: the innovation paths of social enterprise. *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, 88(2), 233–256.
- Project Management Institute [PMI]. (2021). *A guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide) and the Standard for Project Management* (7th ed.). Project Management Institute Inc.
- Raisch, S., Birkinshaw, J., Probst, G., & Tushman, M. L. (2009). Organisational ambidexterity: balancing exploitation and exploration for sustained performance. *Organisation Science*, 20(4), 685–695.
- Rivera-Santos, M., Holt, D., Littlewood, D., & Kolk, A. N. S. (2015). Social Entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 29(1), 72–91.
- Rodríguez-Rivero, R., Ortiz-Marcos, I., Díaz-Barcos, V., & Lozano, S. A. (2020). Applying the strategic prospective approach to project management in a development project in Colombia. *International Journal of Project Management*, 38(8), 534–547.
- Rotheroe, N., & Richards, A. (2007). Social return on investment and social enterprise: transparent accountability for sustainable development. *Social Enterprise Journal*, 3(1), 31–48.
- Scott-Young, C. M., Georgy, M., & Grisinger, A. (2019). Shared leadership in project teams: an integrative multi-level conceptual model and research agenda. *International Journal of Project Management*, 37(4), 565–581.
- Shah, S., & Ganji, E. N. (2019). Sustainability adoption in project management practices within a social enterprise case. *Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal*, 30(2), 346–367.
- Sheik, A., van Rooyen, D., & Mazzei, M. (2022). Social innovation in South Africa: building inclusive economies? *Social Enterprise Journal*, 19(1), 1–22.
- Smara, R. (2025). Where does it come from? Formation of innovative ambidexterity within SMEs in turbulent times. *BRICS Journal of Economics*, 6(1), 185–207.
- Sycheva, S. M., Chernova, T. F., & Evdokimova, Y. A. (2021). Project management transformation in the digital economy. *Socio-economic Systems: Paradigms for the Future*, 269–277. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56433-9_29
- Tamberg, T., Kuura, A., & Soosaar, R. (2021). Project management and entrepreneurship competences. *Central European Economic Journal*, 8(55), 25–43.
- Tereso, A., Ribeiro, P., Fernandes, G., Loureiro, I., & Ferreira, M. (2018). Project management practices in private organisations. *Project Management Journal*, 50(1), 1–17.
- Trokić, A. (2016). Developing an Islamic Bosnian Diaspora Mutual Fund: Islamic Finance, Diaspora Philanthropy and the Economic Development of Bosnia And Herzegovina. *European Journal of Islamic Finance*, (5).
- Turyakira, P., Sendawula, K., Nanyanzi, M., Nantale, H., & Tamale, J. N. (2025). Social entrepreneurship: empirical evidence on its contribution to the realisation of the sustainable development goals in Uganda. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 17(1), 160–172.
- Tywoniak, S., Ika, L. A., & Bredillet, C. (2021). A pragmatist approach to complexity theorizing in project studies: orders and levels. *Project Management Journal*, 52(3), 298–313.
- Urban, B., & Bukula, S. (2024). Earnings generation and strategic alliance-building and as a means of achieving scalability of social enterprises in South Africa. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 25(3), 145–155.
- Volmar, E. B., & Eisenhardt, K. M. (2020). Mavericks and diplomats: Bridging commercial and institutional entrepreneurship for society's grand challenges. *Organization Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2020.13810>
- Wanyoike, C. N., & Maseno, M. (2021). Exploring the motivation of social entrepreneurs in creating successful social enterprises in East Africa. *New England Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 24(2), 79–104.

Publisher's note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.