CHAPTER 9.

WRITING AND SOCIAL PROGRESS: GENRE EVOLUTION IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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To explore the role of writing as a tool of mediation in the formation and evolution of a newly recognized area of activity, we turn in this chapter to the field of social entrepreneurship—work that seeks to address the world's most intractable problems through entrepreneurial behavior and a commitment to the public good. Specifically, this study aims to examine the ways in which a particular genre—with genre defined here as social action (Miller, 1984) and as a typified and recognizable response to recurrent social situations or problems (Bazerman, 1988)—served as a primary driver in the activity of identifying a new category of social actors (social entrepreneurs) and building a new global field (social entrepreneurship). Taking Ashoka as a site of organizational analysis, this chapter tells the story of how one of the world's leading non-governmental organizations (NGO) prioritized, deployed, and evolved a written genre—The Fellow Profile—in order to organize around a vision, respond to changing needs, establish and scale up processes and organizational structures, grow its membership, and communicate its impact to multiple stakeholder groups including funders. [1]

We begin the chapter with a brief overview of rhetorical genre theory and Charles Bazerman's work on writing as a tool of mediation in human activity. We then turn our attention to describing the activity system of social entrepreneurship and, specifically, that system in its relationship to the organizational site of our study, Ashoka, including a comparison between the Ashoka Fellow Profile and a more commonly studied genre, the grant funding proposal. Next, we outline methods for this particular genre study and then present results of

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1   Ashoka is the world's 5th ranked NGO according to the global ranking organization NGO Advisor. Ashoka has offices in 39 countries. Its global headquarters are in Arlington, Virginia, United States. Founded in 1980, Ashoka's mission is "to shape a global, entrepreneurial, competitive citizen sector, one that allows social entrepreneurs to thrive and enables the world's citizens to think and act as changemakers" (www.ashoka.org/about-ashoka).

data collection and analysis. Following this, we discuss the ways in which the tensions between textual regularities and the need for genre change played a role in the development of the field of social entrepreneurship. We conclude with a reflection on the potential value a writing studies perspective brings to global and organizational efforts for social change and call for further genre research in organizations dedicated to advancing social progress.

WRITING AS A HUMAN ACTIVITY AND GENRE STUDIES

To look at the mediating role of writing in the activity system of social entrepreneurship, and in particular the written genre of the Fellow Profile as a driver in the development of the field, we draw on Bazerman's work which examines "how texts arise within and influence the living world of people and events" (2003, p. 309), and, in particular, his set of necessary conditions for "effective actions" (2013, p. 69) to occur:

> Each successful text creates for its readers a social fact. The social facts consist of meaningful social actions being accomplished through language, or speech acts. These acts are carried out in patterned, typical, and therefore intelligible textual forms or genres, which are related to other texts and genres that occur in related circumstances. Together the text types fit together as genre sets within genre systems, which are part of systems of human activity. (2003, p. 311)

In other words, writing—and thus, genres—provide those who write them with a means to regularize communication in specific types of circumstances, for specific purposes, and to specific audiences in ways that are recognizable to readers. Along similar lines, scholars of rhetorical genre theory have offered critical insights into the particular ways in which written genres can serve as important tools of social action (Miller, 1984) and for social action (Devitt, 2021) within activity systems, discourse communities, or communities of practice (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Beaufort, 1997; Bazerman, 2002). Genres of written communication can, for example, advance social change by "destabilizing existing social contexts, introducing new and competing alternatives, connecting new alternatives to what came before, and introducing and stabilizing new and emergent systems" (Faber, 2008). Further, genres can serve as important sites of distributed cognition where particular kinds of discursive knowledge are routinely gathered and shared, and which help orient and coordinate actions among writers and readers. As Spinuzzi notes, "genres are not simply performed or communicated, they represent the thinking out of a community as it cyclically

performs an activity" (2004). In this way, from an organizational perspective, written genres serve both internal and external purposes.

Scholars have also identified the ways in which genres are formed and change over time (Bazerman, 1988; Orlikowski & Yates, 1994). As Bazerman notes, analyzing the formation and emergence of a genre (which is the focus of this chapter) illuminates "the forces to which textual features respond" (1988, p. 62) and "the kinds of problems the genre was attempting to solve, and how it went about solving them" (1988, p. 63). However, as the communities of practice and activity systems form and evolve, and as the external problems, needs, and forces to which a genre is responding change over time, so too must the genre and the infrastructure—defined in this chapter as social, programmatic, and material support (see Read, 2019; Grabill, 2010; DeVoss et al., 2005; Star & Ruhleder, 1996)— surrounding its production adapt if the genre is to remain relevant. The need for a genre's flexibility and adaptability notwithstanding, from a rhetorical genre theory perspective, textual regularities remain a critical feature for maintaining and ensuring the recognizability of the genre. As a result, this tension— the need for textual regularities and the need for variation and change—within a genre is said to be potentially productive; for, as these tensions play out within particular genres and within particular organizations, they provide a window into the internal and external needs and pressures to which a genre must respond while remaining "stabilized for now" (Schryer, 1994, p. 108).

INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTIVITY SYSTEM SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ASHOKA

The activity system of social entrepreneurship has its origins in the work of a group of subjects or actors, social entrepreneurs, who introduce solutions to pressing social and environmental problems (e.g., poverty, human trafficking, climate change). The object of social entrepreneurs, broadly stated, is to improve the quality of life for people in practical ways. To make these improvements, social entrepreneurs use the tools of enterprise and business along with community engagement and the power of ordinary citizens to create novel solutions to what are typically localized problems. Examples of these innovative solutions include the development of micro-finance, community-sourced emergency preparedness social media platforms, greenscaping programs for heavily polluted urban areas, integrated systems to combat human trafficking, and much more.

While individuals fitting the description of social entrepreneur have lived throughout history (see Bornstein, 2007 for a history of the field), it is only in the past 40 years that social entrepreneurship has been galvanized into a recognized field of activity. In this sense, social entrepreneurship represents a

deliberate reframing and destabilization of the narrative related to what we commonly refer to as the nonprofit sector; in principle, social entrepreneurs are individuals who play by a different and somewhat hybrid set of rules than that of either business or traditional non-profits as they apply "the mindset, processes, tools, and techniques of business entrepreneurship to the pursuit of a social and/or environmental mission" (Kickul & Lyons, 2016, p. 1).

This reframing and the establishing of social entrepreneurship as a recognized social fact has been successful, as in recent years and around the world, the community of social entrepreneurship and the work of social entrepreneurs has gained increasing recognition by governments, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and universities, as evidenced by:

- The development of hundreds of degree programs, courses and centers dedicated to social entrepreneurship at major universities around the world (e.g., SAID School of Business at Oxford, the Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship at Duke University, and the Center for Social Impact Strategy at the University of Pennsylvania).
- The rise of academic journals focused on social entrepreneurship such as the Stanford Social Innovation Review; Innovations Journal; the Journal of Social Entrepreneurship; and the International Journal of Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation.
- Increases in published research on social entrepreneurship in indexed, peer reviewed management journals (see Saebi et al., 2019, for a review).
- The emergence of multiple organizations championing frameworks of social entrepreneurship, including the Skoll Foundation, Ashoka, Acumen, the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, and Echoing Green.
- National, state, and local government involvement in social entrepreneurship. For example, in 2009, the U.S. White House under then President Obama created an Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation (see Wolk & Ebinger, 2010, for examples of state and local government models).

How does Social Entrepreneurship Differ from Entrepreneurship and Government-Funded Work?

The word entrepreneurship is derived from a French word that means to "undertake," and involves the "shifting of economic resources into areas of higher productivity and yield" (Dees, 1998), which can lead to "creative destruction" (Schumpeter, 2013, p. 105)—the state at which new ventures effectively render existing products, services, and business models obsolete. While entrepreneurs

and social entrepreneurs share similarities with regard to catalyzing and starting up new organizations and promoting new ideas, the greatest distinction between them is that, for social entrepreneurs, the primary end result of their activity is social impact (see for example, Porter et al., 2014), social value, or social good rather than financial profits.

Among the first organizations to sponsor the idea of social entrepreneurship and bring social entrepreneurs together as a network and community was Ashoka, whose founder and CEO, Bill Drayton, is credited with coining the term "social entrepreneur" (Thorpe, 2019). In simple terms, the work of the social entrepreneur at the individual level begins with one's ability to notice persistent and systemic problems in the local environment; then, beyond the individual's ability to identify the problem and the patterns contributing to its damaging effect, the social entrepreneur has an idea, a strategy, and a personal conviction to do something about it. As Drayton put it, the social entrepreneur is one who is able "to recognize when a part of society is not working and to solve the problem by changing the system, spreading solutions and persuading entire societies to take new leaps" (Drayton, 2005, p. 9). This bottom-up approach to social change, and the development and scaling of solutions that are rooted in the vision of individual leaders and grounded in local, community-based solutions are differentiating features of social entrepreneurship.

In significant ways, social entrepreneurs fill the gaps left when governments and markets fail to adequately address human and environmental needs—typically, basic ones. Where government-driven Calls for Proposals (CFPs) draw the attention and the efforts of researchers, innovators, and knowledge-producers through a top-down structure of soliciting, selecting, and funding the proposals that most effectively respond to the pre-selected, targeted areas of growth and advancement (e.g., war technology, medical technology, etc.), the field of social entrepreneurship depends on grassroots solutions that arise from local communities and are sponsored by local champions.

For the past 40 years, Ashoka has spread the idea of social entrepreneurship primarily through its rigorous process for identifying, designating, and supporting the world's leading social entrepreneurs in a network of "Ashoka Fellows." One example of an Ashoka Fellow is Bart Weetjens who created an organization, Apopo (www.apopo.org) to eliminate landmines left behind by war. The problem that Weetjens recognized was that landmines continue to pose danger to communities long after wars end as the hidden, underground explosives lead to ongoing risks for human death and injury. Weetjens, who is from Belgium, was named an Ashoka Fellow in 2006 for his innovative solution to this social problem—he and his team train giant pouched rats to effectively and safely detect explosives so that communities can safely clear the landmines across thousands

of acres of land. The result—increased safety for people in war-torn neighbor-hoods around the world—allows communities to move beyond a basic concern for survival to reach higher levels of human potential. In this case, Weetjens was not responding to a government-driven CFP or a company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative to remove government-funded war technology left in the earth; rather, as a social entrepreneur, he, himself, had identified a persistent problem in his community, developed technology and processes for addressing the problem in a way that made use of the resources located right there in the same environment, formed teams with local community members to scale up the innovation, and, as a result, was found, selected, and funded by Ashoka as a fellow for his innovation and its potential to scale to other similar communities around the world.

How are Ashoka Fellows Selected?

To date, Ashoka's system for search and selection (the venture process) has led to the election of over 4,100 fellows in over 90 countries.[2] The dynamic system of activity follows five stages. First, on a rolling basis, Ashoka accepts and reviews nominations for fellowship from the social entrepreneurs themselves or from country representatives who are familiar with the work of the potential fellow. At the second stage, Ashoka's global team begins a conversation with the nominee in order to learn about their work. This may include site visits and input from other leaders in their field. Next is what Ashoka refers to as the "second opinion," which is when a senior Ashoka representative from outside the region interviews the candidate in-person, applying Ashoka's criteria, and probing a candidate's life history.[34] The fourth part of the process is "The Panel" for which Ashoka convenes a group of three leading social and business entrepreneurs from the nominee's country to assess the candidate's idea and potential impact in relation to the local context. The panel decides by consensus whether to recommend the candidate to the final stage of the Fellow selection process. Figure 9.1 captures the Ashoka Fellow selection process as explained on the Ashoka Netherlands website, ashoka.org/de/country/netherlands.

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2   ashoka.org/en-tr/frequently-asked-questions

3   At each stage in the process, candidates are evaluated against Ashoka's core criteria: a new idea, creativity, entrepreneurial quality, social impact, and ethical fiber. This identification and review process (referred to internally at Ashoka as "venture" or "search and selection") begins with deep background investigations and multiple extended interviews with the candidate, and with outside references. If a candidate achieves the designation of Ashoka Fellow, they receive several years of significant financial support, and join a global network of peers. A major goal of Ashoka's work is to connect each fellow to the people, ideas, and resources they need to grow and deepen their impact.

THE SELECTION CRITERIA

NEW IDEA
Is this a new idea, solution or approach to a social problem, that will change the pattern in a field?

SOCIAL IMPACT
Is the idea likely to solve a social problem at a national or international level?

CREATIVITY
Does the individual approach opportunities and obstacles creatively?

ENTREPRENEURIAL QUALITY
Does the individual have the determination, ingenuity and realism which characterise a world-class entrepreneur?

ETHICAL FIBRE
Is the individual trustworthy? Does he or she have the highest ethical standards?

VENTURE PROCESS 6-8 MONTHS:

Nomination

National evaluation

International evaluation

Selection panel
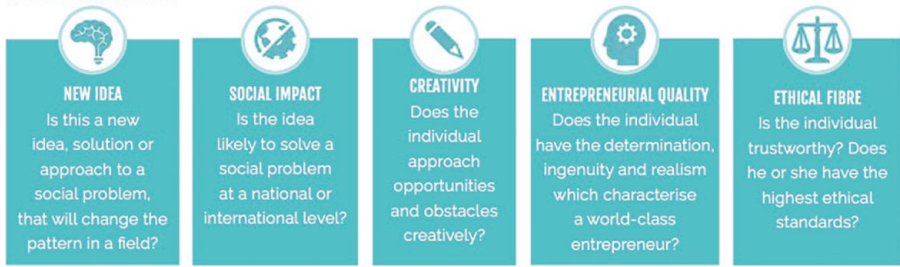
Final approval by Global Boards of Directors

Figure 9.1. Ashoka's process of search and selection

The "data" gathered throughout this elaborate vetting process are captured and documented electronically and systematically along the way through an internal tracking system and culminates in the generation of a Fellow Profile. The developing profile advances with the candidate as they move through the venture process and is revised by Ashoka staff members as the candidate reaches new stages in the process. Finally, the candidate's profile is presented to the Ashoka Global Board of Directors for review, discussion, and vote. Candidates who are approved at the board meeting are then designated Ashoka Fellows. At that time, the Fellow Profile for the successful candidate is made public on the Ashoka.org website and in other publications and venues. Thus, the profile serves first as an internal case statement which contributes to the potential election of the fellow. Then, if the candidate is successful, the profile serves as an external record of the basis for their election as an Ashoka Fellow. (You can find Bart Weetjens' complete Ashoka profile online at www.ashoka.org/en-us/fellow/bart-weetjens.)

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE ASHOKA FELLOW PROFILE AS A GENRE IN THIS SYSTEM OF ACTIVITY?

Within the relatively nascent activity system of social entrepreneurship and the specific context of search and selection within Ashoka, one genre—The Fellow Profile—has emerged and persisted as the primary tool for internally organizing people, activity, ideas, and processes, as well as for presenting evidence for the existence and effectiveness of the impact and activity of social entrepreneurs. In this study, we report on the emergence of this new genre and how it has both remained stable and evolved throughout the formative years of an organization and a field.

233

Given the likely unfamiliarity of the Ashoka Fellow Profile as a genre to most readers, we pause here to consider some of the ways in which the profile relates to the more familiar genre of the funding or grant proposal. Grant funding proposals have been examined and recognized for the ways in which they—as a genre—traditionally respond to problems, are rhetorically persuasive (Conner & Mauranen, 1999; Myers, 1990), exist in a system of interacting genres (Connor, 2000; Tardy 2003), and are parts of larger genre sets (Bazerman, 1994; Devitt, 1991; Pare, 2000). While Myers notes that "the primary purpose of grant proposals is to persuade" and that "the various moves found in the proposals work toward the writer's aim of convincing the funding agency to provide financial support to the proposed problem" (1990, p. 8), for Ashoka and the profile, the surrounding context and the goals of the genre are markedly different. For example, a fellow is not invited into the process of writing their own "proposal." Instead, Ashoka staff members and country representatives are responsible for gathering and documenting evidence throughout a multi-stage system of search and selection. To further highlight this and other critical similarities and differences between these two genres, Table 9.1 focuses on issues of authorship, rhetorical effect, exigence, and implications.

Table 9.1. Comparison of Funding Proposals to Fellow Profiles

Attribute	Funding Proposals	Ashoka Fellow Profile
Authorship: Is the genre written by the person/people seeking funding?	Yes, the principal investigator is the author of the proposal and the person responsible for the outcome of the promised future work/results.	No, the Ashoka Fellow does not write or contribute directly to the Fellow Profile, but is responsible for the outcome of the promised future work/results. (A Fellow Profile is written and revised over months and even years by teams of people beginning with in-country Ashoka Venture Team members who are charged with the search, selection and nomination of potential Ashoka Fellows.)
Rhetorical Effect: Is the genre meant to be rhetorically persuasive with the end result being the funding of a promised/ future project?	Yes, what makes a proposal successful is its approval by the funding agency; that is, the proposal has credibly convinced the funding agency and program officers of the merit of the proposal and the likelihood of the proposal writer(s) following through on the work.	Yes, the profile provides the basis upon which the decision is made as to whether or not a candidate becomes a fellow. If successful (i.e., persuasive), the individual is pro-vided funding by Ashoka in order to focus exclusively on their social entrepreneurship work.

Attribute	Funding Proposals	Ashoka Fellow Profile
Exigence: Within the activity system, is the genre responding to a specific call for funding?	Yes, the process for awarding funding is top-down in that calls for proposals (e.g., in the United States, CFPs issued by the National Science Foundation or National Institutes for Health are meant to guide and focus researchers in particular directions to fill an identified need.	Yes and No. Ashoka has identified five primary areas of social entrepreneurship work – (environment, human rights, economic development, health, and education). However, the call for Ashoka Fellows is ongoing and bottom-up with a process that does not begin or end with an attempt to guide or focus those in the field to meet specific, identified needs. Rather, the call is to the general field of activity with a requirement that the locus of the idea and of the work stem from a potential fellow's ability and past proof of an ability to identify and systemically respond to the particular problems and needs of a community.
Impact: If the genre is successful at accomplishing its goal, is it designed to change the identity of the person who is funded?	No, proposals that are awarded do not intentionally change the identity of the recipient of a grant. Grants are more typically designed to produce the deliverables associated with the funding.	Yes, becoming an Ashoka Fellow itself is a designation, but more importantly, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that becoming a fellow changes the identity of the recipient as he/she becomes recognized as a social entrepreneur and is now part of a network and organization that is committed to the field of social entrepreneurship.

Another genre to which profiles may be usefully compared is that of "capability statements," which, according to Van Nostrand's (2013) account, are ubiquitous in the research and development (R&D) activities of the military industrial complex. Specifically, "as every organization, vendor, and customer alike is obligated to explain itself and do so continually" (Van Nostrand, 2013, p. 171) it is commonplace for an organization to declare its credibility and make a case for its capability to succeed again in new contexts with new demands. As written texts, the main feature of capability statements is their "shared communicative purpose" of *positioning* an organization favorably within a particular industry segment. According to Van Nostrand, it is the "textual structure" that actualizes this purpose; namely, it is in a patterned "sequence of a few textual elements," that past performance is explicitly connected to future activity.

Overall, with regard to how the profile relates to this more familiar written genre of the Capability Statement, it can be said that the architecture and

textual structure of the profile similarly links a fellow's credibility and past success to future potential and that, collectively, the profiles as a genre set fulfill a "shared communicative purpose" for Ashoka and for the field of social entrepreneurship. Specifically, profiles consistently provide evidence of the successful implementation of a fellow's new ideas through impact data—that is to say, the credibility which arises from the fellow's past performance is explicitly stated and connected to a claim of potentiality for the fellow's likely impact in the future. In this way, Ashoka is looking to effectively and efficiently identify people (with ideas and organizations) who will build on past learnings and have greater impact in the future in much the same way a venture capital firm might "bet" on a new business through early-stage investment. And, as is the case with capability statements in R&D activity, the textual structure or sequence of the profiles plays a critical role in shaping a narrative about the fellow—one that begins with the fellow's success with a new idea in a particular context and in response to a local, intractable problem before turning to the character of the social entrepreneur and their potential for greater future impact. The consistency of this narrative (i.e., the unchanging overall structure of the profile), positions Ashoka Fellows as field-level leaders who are worthy of the financial investment and attention of those who are interested in bringing about social change.

THIS STUDY

Ashoka Fellow Profiles as an Object of Study

As noted earlier, Ashoka Fellow Profiles (referred to as profiles and fellow profiles throughout) help systematically organize a complex and dynamic organizational process for selecting Ashoka Fellows. This activity takes place across writers, languages, countries, and fields of work. As an individual text, each profile is identically structured to provide an overview of the social entrepreneur's project and potential for wide-scale, positive social impact according to six content areas (see Table 9.2).

Beyond the function profiles play in the systematized process of search and selection within the organization, Ashoka Profiles offer a substantial resource to those interested in the field and provide a broad and historical view of social entrepreneurship around the world across many areas of work. Notably, and in this regard, fellow profiles have been utilized outside of Ashoka by social entrepreneurship scholars as primary data sources in a number of empirical investigations and peer reviewed journal articles that take up the fellow profiles as evidence and data (e.g., Meyskens et al., 2010; Chandra & Shang, 2017; Sunduramurthy et al., 2016; Nieuwenhuizen, 2020).

Analyzing Genre and Social Progress: The Mediating Role of Writing in Activity

As noted, a central framework for this study is the substantial body of scholarship which has demonstrated the importance of writing in shaping complex social activities and systems, as well as human identity and consciousness (Goody, 1986; Bazerman, 2006). This study further recognizes profiles as "a complex pattern of repeated social activity and rhetorical performance arising in response to a recurrent situation" (Pare & Smart, 1994, p. 122); in this particular case, the recurrent situation emerges from Ashoka's organizational vision and ongoing commitment to identifying leading social entrepreneurs around the world and advancing social entrepreneurship as a credible and defined field of activity on the global stage. The repeated social activity centers around the search and selection of leading social entrepreneurs, the Ashoka Fellows.

To capture these social and practical purposes in our examination of this now recognizable genre and the role it has played in the formation and evolution of the newly established field of social entrepreneurship, we set out to address three overarching research questions:

- What can we learn about genre as a mediating tool in activity systems by examining one genre (the Ashoka Fellow Profile) and following its origins and development over time?
- In what ways and to what extent has the Ashoka Fellow Profile as a genre supported the NGO's internal ability to organize itself and respond to emerging needs over time? And, how, if at all, have the tensions between textual regularities and the need for genre adaptation influenced the organization's overall activity?
- Externally-speaking, how, if at all, has the Ashoka Fellow Profile served as a tool for the early identification of social entrepreneurs while also shaping the growth of the field and a vision of a new global community?

METHODOLOGY

In our analysis of profiles as an object of study, we followed Bazerman's methodological guidelines (2003, pg. 324-326) for pursuing genre investigations. Further, in our study design, we responded to Pare and Smart who challenged writing scholars seeking to understand genres as sites of social action to look beyond the text toward other "observable constituent elements of a genre" (1994, p.122). Thus, in addition to conducting a detailed textual analysis of fellow profiles, we drew on three other sources of data beyond the profiles themselves:

- Interviews with senior Ashoka leaders and staff (n=6) who were knowledgeable of the history of the fellow profile, its role in the search and selection process over time, and profile writing processes and guidelines.
- Interviews with Ashoka Fellows (n=6) of whom the profiles were written and for whom the profile served as an evidentiary text at the point of election to fellowship and beyond.
- Analysis of over 50 internal Ashoka documents and guidelines related to profile writing which were written to both onboard new profile writers and to maintain consistency in the quality and features of the profile as a text over time, across countries and languages.

In selecting appropriate analytical tools to trace the genre of the profile, we applied Pare and Smart's (2004) four categories of analysis across our data sources. Specifically, we set out to trace the regularities of the textual features, social roles, composing processes, and reading practices associated with profile writing in order to more deeply understand both the internal work of the profile at Ashoka and the impact of the profile externally in the field of social entrepreneurship. (See Appendix A for more detail on research methods).

RESULTS

Textual Analysis of Ashoka Fellow Profiles: Form and Function

Sequentially, our analysis of the regularities among textual features, social roles, composing processes, and reading practices began with a close reading of the Ashoka Fellow Profiles and focused on the repeated patterns in overall structure, rhetorical moves, and common style. Table 9.2 presents an overview of the structure of Ashoka Fellow Profiles according to section.

Table 9.2. Structure of Ashoka Fellow Profiles

Fellow Profile Section	Textual Regularities
Year of Election Statement	Informs readers of the year of the fellow's election and the year the profile was written (Note: Profiles are not updated as the fellow's work changes over time.)
1-3 Sentence Overview	Introduces the fellow and their work in 1-3 sentences
The New Idea	Provides a layered and multidimensional description of each fellow's work Describes the local and/or regional context in which a fellow's work takes place

Fellow Profile Section	Textual Regularities
The New Idea (continued)	Builds credibility for the fellow in highlighting their innovative approach
	Appeals to readers' emotions by providing a window into the circumstances and populations being served
	Provides readers with a sense of the fellow's beliefs and values
	Frames the fellow's work as filling gaps and remedying failures in government services and public sector markets, or as catalysts for social movements
The Problem	Describes in detail and with some evidence the challenge the fellow's work is addressing
	Provides historical and national context
	Attends to the ways in which the problems have become normalized in existing systems (i.e., have become the status quo)
The Strategy	Details the Ashoka Fellow's work with a particular focus on the role of the organization that the fellow has launched
	Explains concrete "how-tos"
	Proposes potential replication and scale to other regions and populations
	Positions the fellow and their activation of local resources, organizational leadership skill, and rhetorical abilities at the center of the work
	Includes ways in which fellow's work addresses gaps in existing government services and programs which have left people underserved and in need
The Person	Positions the fellow as possessing deep and personal experience or having had powerful encounters that are often related to the specific problem being addressed
	Demonstrates fellow's past track record of success as a social entrepreneur, often highlighting influential experiences as a young person
	Describes the fellow as being on an entrepreneurial journey with the clear potential to have even greater impact in the future with the right support[4]

INTERVIEWS WITH ASHOKA SENIOR LEADERSHIP AND STAFF

Once the textual analysis of the 40 fellow profiles was complete, we turned to interviews with five senior Ashoka leaders and staff in order to explore the organization's memory of the profile as an emergent and, then, established genre.

4   Ashoka founder Bill Drayton describes three major stages in a social entrepreneur's life: apprenticeship, launch, and maturity. Each of these stages contributes differently to the entrepreneur's efforts and is therefore treated differently within the Ashoka Fellowship.

History of Textual Features of the Ashoka Fellow Profiles: Origins

There is no way to tell the story of social entrepreneurship, Ashoka, or the mediating work of fellow profiles without considering the role of Ashoka's founder, Bill Drayton.[5] In our interview with longtime Drayton collaborator, Bill Carter, he explained the origins and exigence of the profile.[6] As Carter tells it, in the early 1980s, he and Drayton were having breakfast at the Yale Club when Drayton announced, "I figured it out! I figured out what the criteria are for selecting fellows and what the profile should be." In our interview with Drayton, he confirmed Carter's account and further contextualized the exigence of the profile, explaining, "We had been trying to figure out how to communicate the stories of social entrepreneurs. It was a very practical experiment and we were thinking about the readers from the beginning." While it was at that breakfast meeting that the basic structure of the profile was codified and written down, as our interviews will show, it would take the next twenty years to develop the necessary infrastructure to fully support the consistent production of profiles across Ashoka's global organization. Forty years after the "back of the napkin" breakfast conversation, in our interview, Drayton provided a highly refined description of the genre features and an explanation of his vision for its intended effects, stating:

> We started with a teaser line that gives a taste of the person—
> where they were from, what problem they were working on
> and why, although the more elaborated person part comes at
> the end. Now, the new idea has been hinted at, and hopefully
> it draws people into the first paragraph. Like a newspaper
> story, you want to get across the basic and big idea. You want
> people to say, "That's an interesting idea. I see how that could
> work." You lose a lot of people if you don't have that impact
> right away. So, you are fleshing the new idea out, not at
> length but succinctly—at the level of the concept, then you

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5   Drayton, whose Wikipedia profile identifies him as "a social entrepreneur," was a graduate of Yale Law School, a McKinsey consultant for 10 years, Assistant Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during the Presidency of Jimmy Carter, visiting professor at Harvard and Stanford, and a recipient of the MacArthur "Genius Award" in 1984 for his work in founding Ashoka. (The story of the founding of Ashoka and Bill Drayton is chronicled in detail in David Bornstein's book "How to Change the World.") Drayton also was deeply involved in the civil rights movement as a teenager and spent time with Vinoba Bhave (a member of Mahatma Gandhi's inner circle) in India. Drayton conceived of the idea for social entrepreneurship in his days at Yale where he founded the Ashoka Circle.

6   Carter worked closely with Drayton at the EPA, shared his background as a McKinsey consultant, later became a founding Board member of Ashoka and continues to serve in a variety of capacities within the organization.

go to the problems. For example, birds flying over Mexico are asphyxiating and falling to the ground. That's very concrete. You want the reader to say, "Now I see!" That's the second step. Then people can imagine telling their friends. Then you get to the third part. Well, lots of people have noticed the problem, but now, you've got this idea. "I've not heard this before. Where did it come from?" Then you get into the how. The vision. With feet on the ground. The how-tos. And, there you have the elements of the entrepreneurial story. Then you come to the person. And, please do not talk about awards or where they went to school, but what explains how this person's life led to this idea and this set of solutions. You need that life coherence. The hope is that it is designed to allow people to follow the unfolding of the idea. (B. Drayton, personal communication, March 29, 2021)

Drayton's original idea to create a genre that would tell "the entrepreneurial story" and present "the unfolding of the idea" led to the formalization of the Ashoka Fellow Profile structure which has remained in place for over 40 years. Further, Drayton's initial and ongoing consideration for the interaction between the text and the reader hint at his awareness of the profile's potential rhetorical impact. Thus, from the beginning, Drayton's vision for the genre included a sense of the social actions it could inspire (e.g., "That's an interesting idea," "Now I see!" and "Telling their friends").

In spite of the clarity with which Drayton could explain the work of profiles 40 years after their inception, Carter explained that in the early years of Ashoka, Drayton's propensity for history, detail and complexity threatened to undermine the simple structure of the genre. Drayton recognized the same need at that time and, therefore, another colleague, Michael Gallagher, was brought in to "crystalize the structure" of the fellow profile. In our interview with Gallagher, he echoed the same recollection, "While the fundamental categories of Problem, Idea, Strategy, and Person, were already clear in Bill Drayton's head, he did not *communicate* in clear categories when he talked about the early Ashoka Fellows."

Twenty-five years old at the time, Gallagher was brought in to solidify the genre of the profile. He recalled:

In 1987, I had the good fortune to sit through 8 or ten lengthy interviews Bill Drayton had with an early cohort of Brazilian Ashoka nominees. As I sat through 4-to-6-hour interviews, light bulbs started to go off in my head and an Ashoka fog began to burn off. It quickly became clear to me,

> Bill Drayton has a clear methodology he is using, it just has not been written down and explained. To make myself useful on that trip to Brazil, I offered to write profiles of the candidates using the categories I observed Bill was using in interview after interview.

Gallagher's work in further standardizing the categories of the profile at this time was less about telling the story of the candidate social entrepreneur and more about formalizing Ashoka's search and selection process as an organization that needed to scale. Specifically, his work responded to what he referred to as "an important growth-related question for the organization: Can anyone other than Bill Drayton evaluate Ashoka Fellows?" If Drayton were needed to capture the story and evaluate the potential and determine the investment for every Ashoka Fellow, it would be difficult if not impossible for the organization to reliably expand and maintain the vision for a global movement and the rigor of the emerging processes at scale. To achieve these aims, more people needed to be brought into the process of selecting fellows and this included the writing of fellow profiles.

History of Textual Features of the Ashoka Fellow Profiles: Evolution

Though the fundamental structure of the profiles had become more formalized during the early years of the organization, interviews with Ashoka leaders further documented the ways in which the genre and the organization needed to adapt to both internal and external pressures as the organization grew and the genre matured. The most striking example of genre-relevant tension between stability and adaptability that emerged in our interviews centered around one particular section of the profile—The New Idea. Specifically, interview data pointed to the way that (1) the content of the new idea section needed to adjust to the increasing number of fellow elections over time, (2) the organization needed to reconsider and come to agreement regarding the criteria and evaluation of a prospective fellow's new idea, and (3) the new idea section and the profile as a whole needed to become better supported by Ashoka at the organizational level.

From the beginning, the structure of the genre placed priority on the fellow's new idea (i.e., the new idea section comes first before the problem, the strategy, or the person sections in the profile). In fact, interviews with leaders surfaced the widespread use of an internal and informal evaluation criteria known within Ashoka as the "knock out test." Namely, there was an absolute requirement that a prospective fellow possess an idea that would change the pattern in a field or a system of activity, and that the new idea had the potential for replication in other contexts or geographical regions. As interviewees explained, if a candidate did not have a truly "new idea," then they would be "knocked out" of the selection

process.

This early emphasis on new ideas was and has remained important as it reflects Ashoka's founders' goal of creating a radically new process for funding people and their projects—a process that was focused on innovations for social good rather than the pedigree of a person or their personality. What was critical to Ashoka from the start, and thus central in the profile along the way, was the evidence-based and convincing presentation of a new, high-impact idea that was worth spreading. As Carter explained:

> What Bill [Drayton] was focused on was big ideas coming out of the global South transforming the hegemony of the development institutions and governments because, in his diagnosis, those elites had blown it at the World Bank. What they are doing is a waste of time and a waste of money. There are real people who have big ideas and the Muhammed Yunus's of the world are actually in the global South as opposed to relying on these elites at Harvard and places like that who are sitting there with their theories. [7] We just hated that. Instead, we wanted to foster these people with the big ideas. (B. Carter, personal communication, March 22, 2021)

Thus, as social entrepreneurship began to spread and the process for fellow search and selection began to scale, our interview subjects described important tensions that emerged around the new idea section of the profile because there seemed to be a limit on the number of new ideas that were "as big" and as obviously system-changing as someone like Yunus's new idea—microfinance. While Ashoka's country representatives around the world were actively cultivating and nominating fellows who they believed were qualified, these candidates were being rejected for not meeting the new idea criteria and this became a point of organizational tension between the leadership and those in the field. As Carter explained, "We were too tight and it was keeping us from electing fellows. We were rejecting people in Asia and Latin America." (B. Carter, personal communication, March 22, 2021) He went on to describe how these tensions surfaced at a meeting in Virginia among Ashoka's global staff, recalling, "People were

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7   In 2006, Bangladeshi Professor of Economics, Muhammed Yunus, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in developing microfinance—the provision of small loans without collateral to people in poverty. The Nobel committee described Yunus's work as "an important liberating force in societies where women in particular have to struggle against repressive social and economic conditions" (The Nobel Peace Prize, 2006). This recognition from the Nobel committee brought increased visibility for Yunus's long-standing work in attempting to minimize poverty through the organization he launched, the Grameen Bank, as well as attention to the emergent field of social entrepreneurship in which he had become a major figure (Bornstein, 2005).

revolting. It was a riot, literally a riot."

The problem facing Ashoka at this point was not about the profile as a text type, per se; rather, the tension needing resolution had to do with the organization's staff being able to effectively and consistently apply the internal criteria for what constituted a new idea at the same time the definition for what counted as a new idea needed to shift, if the organization was to continue to accomplish its mission. The structure of the fellow profile in this way became a framework for the organizational members to come to terms with scaling up not only processes for coordinated activity, but also for scaling the social roles and material supports needed to align their activities and to share meanings in the face of changing demands and situations arising from the organization's growth.

Regularities in Social Roles: The Impact of Fellow Profiles in and Beyond Ashoka

In response to the need to grow the organizational capacity related to profile writing, Ashoka's leaders invested in the development of new positions, programmatic offerings, and textual supports (discussed in the next section), aimed at producing profiles that would meet the organization's high standards. Specifically, interviews with Ashoka staff pointed to a variety of human resources—people in positions—that emerged over time and that directly related to the activity surrounding the profiles, (e.g., fellow nominators, profile writers, profile editors, board-level reviewers, and more). These positions became part of an expanding internal social network within the organization whose primary activity revolved around the activity of data gathering and profile writing within the context of searching for and selecting Ashoka Fellows. The expansion occurred geographically as the organization continued to scale its work and establish new offices (e.g., in Italy, Germany, Japan, as well as in the MENA region and in West, South, and East Africa) while it advanced the specialization of positions. Individuals, for example, became specialists within various aspects of search and selection, including, for example, individuals who became recognized as strong writers to serve as lead profile writers or the recognition of fellow nominators who had access to extended networks within the entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship communities in particular countries and regions.

INTERNAL ASHOKA DOCUMENTS AND GUIDELINES

Regularities in Composing Processes: Further Development of Metagenres and Human Infrastructure

As Ashoka invested in human resources to stabilize and support scaling efforts, they also added material supports in the form of meta-genres that guided the

production of the genre, "ruling out some kinds of expression, endorsing others" (Giltrow, 2002). With regard to the internal tensions related to the new idea, for example, such guidelines were introduced for the purpose of streamlining the thinking and better coordinating the activity, up and down the organization.

One of the individuals responsible for the development of these new guidelines was Chris Cusano, who recalled in his interview how, in November 2000, as a new staff member hired into the position of profile editor, he found himself needing to identify and resolve the tensions that had emerged around the profile. After Cusano had read the entire record of board meeting minutes "as case law," Cusano met with Carter and others to address the internal conflict related to the evolving standards for a big, new idea. They decided to create two documents to support the profile writing process: "Newness in Known Fields" and "New Idea Types."

The "Newness in Known Fields" document set out to address two problems for profile writers. According to Cusano, "First, Ashoka was looking for new ideas—the newer the better. Second, they knew that there were not many truly new, original, striking ideas. So, what then was the threshold for newness? How could Ashoka distinguish between the innovations they were looking for and merely incremental or derivative evolution, especially in well-established and well-known fields?" The solution presented to profile writers in the "Newness in Known Fields" document was the identification of known fields like ecotourism, fair trade, and entrepreneurial training programs for youth, followed by distinctions (with examples) between common innovations in those fields and Ashoka's requirement for innovation that reflected "the next order of thinking altogether."

The "New Idea Types" document helped further by providing profile writers with archetypes of social entrepreneurs—the architect, the master organizer, the patient teacher, mentor or coach, and the visionary reformer—along with examples and definitions of four types of new ideas:

- Creating an entirely new field.
- Bringing citizenship to a strategically important group that has faced systematic discrimination.
- Changing the behavior of an important link in civil society.
- Inventing or re-inventing a routine process that citizens pass through.

Perhaps the most important section of the "New Idea Types" document was entitled "Yet is Not" (underline in the original) which describes in detail four counter-archetypes that did not meet Ashoka standards; namely, the (1) leading expert or professional, (2) the activist, (3) the dedicated social worker, or (4) the creative executive, enlightened bureaucrat, or consultant. Carter noted, "We handed [the Newness document] out to our country representatives and that was the breakthrough. What was a social entrepreneur and what wasn't." (C.

Cusano, personal communication, March 29, 2021)

As detailed in his interview, Cusano's deeper diagnosis with regard to revisioning the new idea went beyond profiles as texts into the interconnected processes of search and selection and the surrounding culture at Ashoka. Beyond the establishment of guidelines to clarify the new idea sections of these document types, then, Cusano set out to address the broader issue of aligning the profile to the evolving social aspects of the search and selection processes in a number of ways, including the training of global staff members, the creation of additional supporting materials to guide profile writing and writers, and the hiring of people with backgrounds in writing. In his interview, he explained his plan to support profile writing by focusing first on training and developing profile writers:

> So, really what you're dealing with mostly is how people relate
> to each other and understand each other's roles and functions.
> And, so it was very important to me to turn away from focus-
> ing on the skill set of writing because what I realized is that
> Ashoka doesn't hire people because they could write. It's not
> fair to take an adult who you hire for other professional qual-
> ities, like entrepreneurship or whatever, to bring them in and
> then start kind of criticizing them for not being a good writer.
> (C. Cusano, personal communication, March 29, 2021)

One of the documents Cusano created was called, "Six Principles of Profile Writing: And a Few Tips." The document focused not on the mechanics of writing profiles but on establishing a stronger culture of writing at Ashoka and on creating norms for the processes surrounding profile writing (e.g., the first principle in the document states: "Profiles are written in groups"). Later, however, Cusano and others did develop documents to address multiple features of the writing itself, including documents entitled: "Checklist for Profile Editing," "General Tips on Profile Writing," "What is a Profile," "What's Wrong with Jargon."

Jargon was a particular area in which Cusano sought to build capacity at the word level of profile writing. Remarking that one draft profile he read included the word community "56 times in three pages," Cusano created a document called "The Ashoka Jargon List" made up of 80 words which Ashoka writers "should watch out for" including: mobilize, operationalize, methodology, provide, focus, grassroots, capacity-building, institution-building, low-income, peri-urban, community, and disadvantaged. Cusano's guidance to profile writers regarding jargon was that adding these kinds of words for significance often had the opposite effect on readers. Cusano suggested that some words on the list "should be avoided altogether while others should cause readers and writers to

pause and consider whether they mean something or not, whether they deliver the meaning they hope to, and whether what they mean can be said more clearly." (C. Cusano, personal communication, March 29, 2021)

In addition to beginning to explicitly standardize textual features by codifying structure, rhetorical moves, and style, the team also developed a one-page guide that covered the entire profile called "The Matrix." Carter explained that "the matrix guidelines took it even further by helping to focus on the most important area where the Fellow was making their big bet." (B. Carter, personal communication, March 22, 2021) In the matrix, the new idea presented a structure for capturing whether the fellow was developing a new field or was innovating within a known field. The matrix document divided the problem section into two categories as well—the material side of the problem (i.e., "how people feel the problem,") and systemic (i.e., the ways in which existing ideas, institutions and/or patterns "fail, fall short and need help"). In the strategy section, the matrix reads, "What is the principle that makes sense of the candidate's choices about how to succeed? Examples: To open markets; to create a new profession; to be first and open the way for others to follow." (B. Carter, personal communication, March 22, 2021)

Below these general guidelines are open text boxes where Profile writers—in many cases, the reviewer or country representative—are provided space to take notes. For example, the boxes under the problem section read, "systemic problem explained" and the boxes under the strategy section read, "systemic solution applied," thus encouraging clear connections between the problems and the solutions in each case and furthering the profile writers' overall conceptual understanding of the important relationship between problems and solutions in all cases. The person section explicitly invites the reviewer to identify one of two pathways to explain the origin of the fellow's idea. For example, the profile writer can focus on the fellow's "Evolution," that is, a chronology from childhood, or on an "Epiphany" a life changing event. In the document, both of these pathways leave space for the writer to include an "Anecdote," which Carter described as "a note of grace, where the reader can have the voice of the fellow right in front of them." (B. Carter, personal communication, March 22, 2021) Taken together, these guidelines—a representation of Ashoka's investment in meta-genres—provided a layer of material support to the goal of stabilizing and scaling the genre of the Fellow Profile over time.

Regularities in Reading Processes: Profiles as Catalysts for Individual and Societal Transformation

While readers of the profile were on the mind of the founders of Ashoka from the beginning, our interviewees drew on a variety of metaphors to capture the

particular ways in which the genre has aimed to influence readers in recurring ways. Drayton, for example, focused on the role of readers and their engagement with the profiles, connecting this activity to the broader goal of the organization to spread social entrepreneurship. He presents the profile as an invitation to shift or sway public thinking and mindset around the potential of the field, stating, "In the profile we have the paradigm. Every time someone reads a profile, they in effect read a paradigm statement that defines social entrepreneurship."

Another senior leader, Cusano, referred to the profile as a tool for transportation or movement and, like Drayton, focused on the reader's ability to better understand and thus spread social entrepreneurship as a result, stating:

> The profile is a vessel for the new idea, it's an exemplar, that delivers another instantiation of the paradigm. Not only are we saying here is the person who works with manual scavengers in Dubai, but we're explaining that the way this person works with manual scavengers in Mumbai, is yet another instantiation of the thing we call social entrepreneurship. (C. Cusano, personal communication, March 29, 2021)

In fact, and in alignment with Drayton's and Cusano's comment on the impact of the profiles on readers, Ashoka's consistent production and distribution of fellow profiles in the aggregate is by design a method for providing a strong evidence base which in effect establishes the field itself as a social fact. As Cusano further noted:

> To build the field [of social entrepreneurship], it's not the individual instances that matter, for what you need is a big undeniable chunk of evidence to show that you've been productive. And, I've heard that same thing echoed by other social entrepreneurs working on other issues where data is important, for example, in the human rights field. Just reporting about one case of disappearance isn't enough, you need to have 150 cases documented in a big thick report that you can smack down on someone's desk and say, you can't deny this, this is real. (C. Cusano, personal communication, March 29, 2021)

In addition to the work of establishing the social roles to ensure the stability of the profile across a global organization, in his interview, Drayton shared his perspective on the ways profiles influenced the lives and identities (i.e., the social roles) of the candidate fellows themselves. Drayton stated:

> One of the most important effects of Ashoka's fellow selection process is that it helps all the candidates understand who they are. Being able to say out loud for the first time that one *is a social entrepreneur* is very powerful—and hugely empowering. Thus, the first impact of the profile is on the candidates themselves. I've heard a good many say that the profile has given them a perspective that they didn't have before or that they didn't have consciously before. (B. Drayton, personal communication, March 29, 2021)

The hope for Drayton and Ashoka was that the genre of the profile would support a process that was beneficial to the candidates along the way (even if they were not ultimately chosen as a fellow); if the process was ultimately successful, the published profile would stand as the evidentiary case which led to the official naming of an "Ashoka Fellow." As a genre, the profile and its surrounding activity facilitates a process and is, in the end, a speech act which transforms the identities of real individuals who can, from that point on, take on a truly novel and globally-recognizable social identity, or role, with all of the benefits and expectations attached.

Interviews with Drayton and former Ashoka President, Diana Wells provided additional anecdotal evidence to describe other ways in which profiles are taken up by readers including the sharing of knowledge of innovative practices across fields of work and geographical regions; as sources for journalists and researchers investigating some of society's most pressing issues; and, in fundraising (sometimes involving dramatic sums of money) for the social entrepreneurs themselves and for Ashoka.

Interviews with Ashoka Fellows

Regularities in Reading Processes

Finally, in seeking to gain a more complete picture of the role(s) of the profile, we invited the subjects of the profiles—Ashoka Fellows—to take part in interviews as a special class of readers. To begin, several fellows noted that they had not read their Ashoka Profile in several years. For example, Fellow Aaron Pereira, 2004, France, indicated that he hadn't read his profile in 17 years, commenting, "So this feels so so so distant to me!" He went on to say, "There's a part where I love the historical record of it. However, I do wish that it had the ability to be more profoundly updated alongside the historical record. That's been a bit of a strange thing for me with my Profile as it's pretty far off from what I'm doing now."

Similarly, Jane Leu, 2005, United States, remarked:

> I never gave much thought to the profile itself and no one has really ever referenced it to me, at least not in a long time. I got elected in 2005, so it's possible that I've just forgotten a lot of these things. But my assessment is that it has stood the test of time. The small details have changed but the overall case statement, problem, and strategy has remained the way Ashoka described it. Not bad! Especially since UpGlo (the name of her organization) recently celebrated being a twenty-year-old organization that has helped 18,000 foreign-born professionals pursue their careers in the US. (J. Leu, personal communication, April 25, 2021)

Greg Van Kirk, 2008, United States, mentioned the potential for profiles to become quickly outdated as was his experience, whereas Aleta Margolis, 2000, United States, felt "the wording I would write is exactly the same today." And, like Margolis, David Castro, 2009, United States, said:

> The profile was, to the best of my understanding, a recapitulation of the case for why I should be a fellow, that's what it was, it was the case statement, and it was highly congruent with my work, it was how I explained my fundamental work. And, that has not changed that much in the sense that the profile captured some of the big drivers of my work. For me, it's always been about community empowerment that's the driving force behind the work that I do. (D. Castro, personal communication, April 26, 2021)

Overall, fellows expressed in different ways the value of the search and selection process, and in particular, the framing of their work within the sections of their fellow profile. Margolis remarked, for example, that although she had been leading her organization, The Center for Inspired Teaching, for five or six years when she became a fellow, the question-and-answer sessions that took place during her election process provided her with lasting value in identifying and articulating her strategy which then was captured in the strategy section of her fellow profile. She noted, "The process of being, and I will use the word, *forced* to articulate what it is, I do, and why was incredibly important, not only in talking about how Inspired Teaching works, but in doing it."

Lennon Flowers, 2016, United States, also remarked on how structuring her story in the format of the profile held real value for her work, "The framing

of the problem statement first, followed by the strategy to address the component parts of that problem, and the big idea underlying all of it, all had a big influence on how I shaped The Dinner Party (the name of her organization) from Day 1."

David Castro also pointed to the ways in which the search and selection process, captured and reflected in his fellow profile, had a powerful influence on his identity, stating:

> I think, for me, one of the highlights of the whole process even to this day, is to imagine myself as a social entrepreneur. I didn't see myself in the entrepreneur paradigm, I might have seen myself as a change maker. I saw myself as a leader. I didn't necessarily think of myself as an entrepreneur and that framing made me really think deeply about what entrepreneurship is and what social entrepreneurship is, and that has been a lasting and powerful impact on my work. The other thing that the profile does is put you in the mind of the community of other people who are profiled along with you. And, if you bring the right energy to that which is to think of yourself as being part of a community, you can benefit enormously from the relationships that come out of it. (D. Castro, personal communication, April 26, 2021)

Castro went on to describe his sense of the role of profiles in the Ashoka Fellow global community:

> Profiles are interesting in the sense that they're archetypes and patterns and descriptions of inspirational work. I think of them like sonnets as they do have a certain form, and they capture an essence of the work, but when you get into the work the cases are always more involved. The profile is a map, not the territory. When you get into the territory, you're going to see that maybe it wasn't exactly the way it was described in the profile because Ashoka is working to make the work fit into a paradigm and nobody's work totally fits the paradigm it's an approximation. But another important element is the solidarity, the sense of motivation that comes from knowing that you're not alone in your work and that's something that is really important, because people get burned out. People get tired and especially when they run into obstacles which we all do. So, knowing that there are other people out there who are

inspirational keeps you going when you run into hard spots.
(D. Castro, personal communication, April 26, 2021)

Castro and the other Ashoka Fellows' perceptions of the ways in which profiles work and are part of a larger sphere of social activity add additional support to earlier findings in the study; namely, the search and selection process and the structure the profile provided for that process had a relatively immediate impact on the fellows, including the funding of their ventures. Interviews with Ashoka leaders, staff and fellows underscored the central mediating role of profiles for organizing Ashoka's global activity. Internally, the fellow profile plays a pivotal role throughout the search and selection process, as even the initial notes taken in the first opinion interviews become data for what will become the final profile presented to the board and, ultimately, a new fellow's public-facing profile.

It would be, however, an oversimplification to reduce the complex search and selection process to the profile itself; for, while the profile is central, it is embedded in a growing set of genres and increasingly broader systems of activity. Cusano hinted at the interconnection of the dynamic social process to the profile as genre (i.e., social action) stating, "the profile is only one data source by which the board of directors makes their decisions, as they rely also on notes, their own subject matter expertise, and their confidence in the people in the room." In this way, we can identify profiles as part of an internal genre set aimed directly at supporting the primary activity of electing fellows and building the field of social entrepreneurship, including the board minutes of the profile decisions which are sent to all 450 staff members across Ashoka's global organization. Wells remarked on this point, "Board comments regarding profiles are made public to all staff. Those minutes are Ashoka's pedagogy, not whether they passed or not, but why."

DISCUSSION

In significant ways, what we know today about the field of social entrepreneurship and of social entrepreneurs has been influenced by Ashoka and the genre of the fellow profile which they developed. By studying the exigence and evolution of the profile over time, we can appreciate the birth and growth of an entire field through one organization's intentional efforts to create and maintain a genre (and the social action associated with that genre), as well as the genre set and system that has evolved through productive tensions between the genre's remarkable stability and the need for change and adaptation over time. Beginning with a leader who first noticed something different, sought to identify what it was, and then developed a process to encourage others to do the same, Ashoka

spread and scaled the idea of social entrepreneurship such that it has now matured from a social movement into an established, recognizable field of activity around the world.

In this study, we set out to explore what we, as writing researchers, could learn about genre as a mediating tool in activity systems by examining this one genre—the Ashoka Fellow Profile—and following its origins and development over time. Interviews with Drayton and Carter pointed toward the very beginnings of an origin story—a focused moment in time, a kairotic moment in which the problem of identifying the qualities of a social entrepreneur was answered by the creation of criteria and a framework for the search and selection of other people and projects possessing the same caliber of impact and innovation for social good. Whether they knew it or not, unidentified social entrepreneurs were doing the work of changing systems and mindsets and locating connected resources in the environments of problems. Rather than a top-down funding model that called for these professionals to pause their efforts and mold their activities into the shape of a CFP, Ashoka's radical approach to funding disrupted this pattern by heading into the field itself and cultivating individual social entrepreneurs through a process that would, according to the fellows interviewed in this study, be of great value to the fellows themselves.

Drayton's prioritization of written profiles from the very start of Ashoka's work was intentionally designed to destabilize the narrative of international aid and to critique the mediocrity of the non-profit sector as a whole, both of which he perceived as languishing in uninspired, inefficient practice. By relabeling the non-profit sector as "the citizen sector," and infusing both the discourse of development and the work of nonprofits with the energy of entrepreneurship, he was able to enlist others in stabilizing a new model of activity centered in the local yet scalable ideas of social entrepreneurs, and normalizing all of this as a new field of work. Ashoka accomplished this in part through their consistency and attention to detail in the work of searching for and identifying leading social entrepreneurs (at an average of 100 per year for 40 years), an activity that was organized around the structure and process of the profile.

As a mediating tool in the activity of social entrepreneurship, then, the fellow profile became not only a text and evidentiary case for an election decision, but also a reflection on an internal system-wide and global process for that election. Further, beyond the internal impacts, the fellow profile has generated, over years, the social fact of the social entrepreneur and a textual record of the existence of a field and a way for those outside of the field to recognize, understand, and support it. In the case of Ashoka as the site for this study, the fellow profile was described in interviews as a tool for documenting social entrepreneurs' activity; a paradigm for a how to understand and engage with

the world; a criteria for fellowship; a lengthy process for maximizing a social entrepreneur's potential for impact; a system of interconnected genres, meta-genres, people and positions; an invitation to funding agencies to support the work of social entrepreneurs; a sonnet; and, a framework that is actively changing the world. In short, findings from this study suggest that the mediating roles of this particular genre are dynamic and multi-dimensional such that no one metaphor (e.g., tool) accounts for all that it accomplishes, internally or externally. In fact, the genre of the profile is so intertwined to the origin and growth of the organization and the field that it is difficult to know whether the birth and growth of the field influenced the real and metaphorical roles of the profile or if the profile—through all of its maturation—was the primary object to influence the direction of the field.

More narrowly, the Ashoka Fellow Profile as a genre supported the NGO's internal ability to organize itself and respond to emerging needs over time. Interviews with Ashoka leaders and review of supporting materials pointed to particular decisions made early and throughout the organization's history to utilize the profile and its regularized textual features to:

- coordinate activity systematically
- develop and distribute meta-genres to guide profile writers and writing across countries and languages
- create personnel positions to regularize organizational and composing processes
- reconcile internal conflicts over terminology, concepts, and criteria

A close reading and analysis of the 40 selected Ashoka Fellow Profiles showed how consistent the textual features of the genre have been applied and reinforced over time. Though the summarizing activity inherent in the textual analysis of the profiles does obscure many of the unique and individual features of individual profiles, the analysis does showcase their uniformity in content areas, focus, style, and intended rhetorical impact (i.e., persuasive force). These regularities, associated with the profiles for over 40 years, are arguably one of the main forces behind the success of Ashoka in contributing to the establishment of the field of social entrepreneurship and the establishing of the identity of social entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurship as a "social fact." Further, the analysis points to a consistent yet broad audience for the profiles, with the primary audiences being the Ashoka board members and the candidate fellows and secondary audiences including funders, Ashoka staff members, other fellows, and those interested in the field of social entrepreneurship.

The greatest example of tensions arising between textual regularities and the need for genre change was evident in interviewees' recalling of the internal,

organizational conflict over what constituted the new idea. A byproduct of organizational and field growth, the emergence of divergent interpretations of a big, new idea led to sincere efforts on behalf of the organization to develop infrastructure—through human and material resources—to stabilize and regularize the genre while adapting to new shifts in the field of social entrepreneurship. As the profile encountered new social contexts and situations, and as the field of social entrepreneurship and Ashoka grew, elements within the profile required adaptation and change, even as the overall structure of the profiles remained the same. This tension between the stable aspects of the genre and the need for evolution were absolutely necessary if the genre of the profile was to stay relevant to Ashoka's mission and vision. We find these tensions instructive and generative in considering the processes, complexity, and nature of what constitutes, what Bazerman referred to as, "a successful text" (2003, p. 311).

With regard to the profile as a genre that operates somewhat similarly to R&D capability statements, our research made clear the ways in which profiles consistently link a fellow's past success with a new idea in a particular context to their future potential impact on a greater scale. Beyond this positioning of individual fellows, it is worth considering the way in which profiles in the aggregate—the entire set of fellow profiles—serve as *a kind of capability statement for Ashoka itself*; specifically, the profiles are evidence of Ashoka's successful 40-year record. As Ashoka does the organizational work of operating and scaling itself, the success of its process and of its fellows establishes its credibility to continue and do more.

As a collection, profiles reveal Ashoka as an organization that is not only skilled in identifying leading social entrepreneurs but also in building a professional community that is in possession of highly specialized forms of valuable knowledge, including: a deep understanding of and network of relationships in a variety of regions around the world (e.g., Ashoka has over 400 fellows in India) and subject matter expertise that is focused on a variety of global problems and solutions (e.g., Ashoka has over 200 fellows working on issues of crime and corruption around the world). New ideas derived from fellows in the election process are, as we have seen, required to show promise of scalability and replicability; thus, Ashoka as a global network possesses a great deal of knowledge which it can and does share. Further, the profiles generate new knowledge as the body of fellow profiles (now over 4000) are used in a variety of empirical studies. In these ways, the collection of profiles does not only reflect the capability of the organization or its members at any given point, but also the evolving breadth and depth of the field of social entrepreneurship over time.

However, beyond their use as a knowledge source in research on social innovation, more importantly is the degree to which profiles provide a site of

learning for Ashoka itself. As an early and evolving organization committed to establishing and sharing a vision of a particular kind of actor (the social entrepreneur) and a new field (social entrepreneurship), the profiles have provided a dedicated space to answer two key questions—"What is social entrepreneurship?" and "Who are social entrepreneurs?"

Finally, this study also set out to examine if and how the Ashoka Fellow Profile has served as a tool for the early identification of social entrepreneurs while also shaping the growth of the field and a vision of a new global community. In this regard, interviews and textual analyses document how, in the process of electing fellows and building their global presence, Ashoka has produced many texts, and many social facts. These facts as construed in the profiles themselves would not have existed without Ashoka creating them. And, although Ashoka's accountability ultimately is to its funders, board of directors, and other stakeholders, it has emerged as a highly credible organization known for its high standards. In Ashoka's production of text and activities, we have seen increasingly refined systems that lead towards predictable sets of outcomes, which are most apparent to those who are familiar with the work. Here then is another example of highly typified genres embedded in highly typified systems of activity within which the social facts that are created lead to consequences in the real world.

CONCLUSION

The Ashoka Fellow Profiles tell a special kind of story. They communicate a paradigm of action to be shared—portraits of a group of global actors who are working to solve difficult environmental and social problems, along with details of their strategic initiatives and approaches. In the aggregate, the stories communicate a vision of a field in which these actors are exemplars. From its inception, Ashoka's leaders shaped the profiles purposefully to resonate with readers in order to communicate something new and persuasive, which would inspire rational optimism and foster imaginations of new possibilities. The production, circulation, and use of these stories (that is to say, writing as a mediating tool in activity), in part, constitutes the very activity of Ashoka, and has contributed to the creation of a new field, social entrepreneurship, and of a new identity, the social entrepreneur.

The genre analysis of Ashoka and the profile suggests that writing studies researchers may gain a great deal through investigating the role of writing in organizations that are working to foster social change. Understanding more clearly the discursive practices of organizations who have proven effective in advancing social progress can be a promising knowledge source for others interested in advancing social justice and environmental sustainability, disrupting,

and changing antiquated and oppressive systems, and "providing the tools for thinking about social creativity in making new things happen in new ways" (Bazerman, 2003, p. 311).

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APPENDIX A (MORE DETAILS ON RESEARCH METHODS)

Data Sources

Textual Analysis of Ashoka Fellow Profiles

To manage the number of profiles included in this genre analysis, we followed

Bazerman's directive to identify a point of diminishing returns plus a couple more (2003, p. 327). First, we were interested in the profiles' ability to showcase the scope of the Ashoka Fellows as social entrepreneurs and also of Ashoka as a leading organization for orchestrating this global work. Second, we were interested in tracing possible changes to the profile as a text type over the organization's 40-year history. To accomplish these inquiry goals, we conducted a close reading of the regularities in textual features for a selection of 40 fellow profiles which were chosen according to the following criteria:

- Scope over time: one profile was selected from each year since the organization's founding.
- Scope of global representation: as a collection, the profile data set included 26 countries.
- Scope of gender representation: as a collection, the profiles reflected ½ male fellows and ½ female fellows.

Once selected, each profile was coded for three broad rhetorical dimensions of textual regularity (following Pare & Smart, 2004, p. 123):

- Repeated patterns in structure
- Rhetorical moves
- Common style

Interviews of Ashoka Leaders and Fellows

To understand the social roles, composing process and reading practices associated with the fellow profiles, we personally conducted semi-structured interviews with Ashoka's senior leadership, key staff members and Ashoka Fellows.

Interviews with Ashoka leadership and senior staff (n=5) focused on the following categories of inquiry:

1. The origin of the profile.
2. Changes to the profiles over time.
3. The influence of profiles on the processes and people involved in search and selection.
4. The kinds of knowledge and discourse embedded in the profiles.
5. Evidence of external impact of the profile for Ashoka.

Interviews with Ashoka Fellows (n=6) differed in that we asked each individual to read (prior to the interview) their own profile and to consider it retrospectively. Interview questions included:

- What can you say about how the profile was developed at the time of your election as an Ashoka Fellow?

- What, if any, was the impact of the profile on your work at that time?
- How do you view the durability of the profile for your work over time?
- Can you explain the relevance of the profile to your work today?
- Do you have any evidence of the impact of the profile individually or on the field?

Internal Ashoka Documents and Guidelines

Examination of Ashoka documents and guidelines followed closely the methodological work of Paré and Smart who, in their analysis of predisposition reports (as an example of genre as social activity that embodies a shared, repeated, and observable strategy), identified the important role of organizational guidelines (if provided) in making clear the essential components (structural, rhetorical, and stylistic) of texts so that the strategy can be intentionally enacted by a collective group (e.g., professionals, organizations) over time, across contexts, etc. with regularity. Such guidelines, they say, "do more than prescribe the sequence and function of the report sections, they also provide a set of rhetorical moves" (1994, p. 124). They also pointed out the ways in which generic restrictions ensure regularity, for example, the types of evidence that can or cannot be employed.

Thus, as a part of our analysis of the profile, we reviewed over 50 instructional and supporting documents, which had been developed to guide or inform multiple aspects of the profile writing process. Specifically, we looked for evidence of the organization guiding its writers to ensure regularities in textual features and to consider ways in which these documents reflected changes in elements of the profile. A selected list of these guideline documents include:

- "What is a Profile?"
- "Checklist for Profile Editing"
- "General Tips on Profile Writing"
- "Ashoka Jargon List"
- "The [Profile] Matrix"
- "Ashoka Board Minutes"