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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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A home in the ocean: how identity shapes social purpose in a small family business

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how organizational identity evolves to sustain social purpose in long-lived family firms. Drawing on an online ethnographic case study of Peter Café Sport – a century-old maritime family business in the Azores – we trace how founding narratives, legacy-based commitments, and deep relational networks shaped responses during the COVID-19 crisis. Our findings show that organizational identity, often viewed as a stabilizing force, can also be a generative resource for adaptive action, promoting the balance between social and economic logics even in times of disruption. We demonstrate that the founder's social involvement not only persists but can be reactivated decades after inception, enabling the reaffirmation of the firm's enduring role as a community anchor. By explaining how hybrid economic – social logics sustain across organizational life stages, the study advances understanding of social entrepreneurship in crisis, emphasizing the role of family organizational identity beyond start-up contexts, and deepens insight into how small family enterprises preserve and reinterpret their social mission over time.

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SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities; SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

Paris has the Harry's Bar, Singapore has the Raffles,
New York has the McSorley's Saloon, and Faial, in the
middle of the Atlantic, has Peter Bar

In the Associated Press, Patrick Reyena, 1986

1. Introduction

Few places embody the emotional, historical, and symbolic depth of Peter Café Sport (PCS), a century-old maritime family business (FB) on the Atlantic frontier that continues to serve as a beacon of identity and community for sailors worldwide. We draw on PCS's unique case to explore how organizational identity of a small FB sustains a founder-promoted social mission across generations within an insular context. We explore how organizational identity – defined as collectively constructed understandings of 'who we are' and expressed through actions and symbols (Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Fiol 1991; Whetten, Godfrey, and Gioia 1998) – enables

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the continuity of social purpose in a small FB. PCS is an example of organizations where identity is historically layered and socially embedded (Bövers and Hoon 2021; Brinkerink et al. 2020) and of FBs where social value is declared and lived in everyday practice (Boers and Ljungkvist 2019; Miller, Steier, and Le Breton-Miller 2016).

Recent scholarship has sought to clarify the related construct of organizational legacy, understood as an enduring influence from the past composed of values, norms, and meanings transmitted through artefacts, traditions, and organizational arrangements, and continually interpreted across generations (Radu-Lefebvre et al. 2025). Rather than viewing legacy as static inheritance, this perspective highlights how historically sedimented meanings may be selectively preserved, reinterpreted, or transformed over time. Yet we know little about how legacy operates in small, place-embedded FBs whose social missions are intertwined with community life. While studies often privilege organizational perspectives, leaving the lived experiences of beneficiaries and community members underexplored in understanding how social missions are interpreted and sustained (Bacq, Janssen, and Noël 2019; Boers and Ljungkvist 2019), we therefore examine how historically embedded narratives and organizational legacy shape and sustain hybrid economic and social logics in a small FB, particularly during moments of crisis and disruption. This question gains renewed significance in light of recent research on how entrepreneurial actors navigate crises by activating identity-based and community-rooted resources that sustain purpose and adaptation (Kawai and Sibunruang 2025; Wang et al. 2024). Through an online ethnographic case study of PCS, we examine how organizational identity – rooted in family history – functions as a mechanism through which legacy is enacted and translated into ongoing social purpose within a multigenerational FB located on a small island in the Azores archipelago, Portugal.

By answering our research question, we make four contributions to the literature. First, we advance the field of social entrepreneurship, typically defined as innovative, value-creating activity rooted in social missions (Mair, Robinson, and Hockerts 2006), by showing how such missions can be upheld not only by formal social enterprises but by small FBs, where hybrid social-commercial logics (Robinson, Mair, and Hockerts 2009) emerge from historically embedded values and deep community ties (Ebrashi 2013; Ramani, SadreGhazi, and Gupta 2017), and where local embeddedness shapes entrepreneurial purpose and identity continuity (Redhead and Bika 2025). Second, we reveal that core historical narratives – often dismissed as symbolic – retain strategic relevance for generations, helping organizations mobilize both material and normative resources (Espedal and Carlsen 2024), including relational, emotional, and cognitive forms of resilience often observed in crisis-driven entrepreneurship (Klyver and Steffens 2025; Ramli et al. 2023) in alignment with their mission. In doing so, we extend research in social entrepreneurship by positioning organizational identity as a key mechanism through which legacy sustains and adaptively renews social missions over time. Third, addressing calls for more situated analyses of identity work during crises (Ashforth 2020; Bettinelli et al. 2022), we show that in small FBs, identity operates not merely as a stabilizing or constraining force (e.g. Nag, Corley, and Gioia 2007), but as a flexible, generative resource that guides decision-making in moments of uncertainty, consistent with studies on emotional leadership and adaptive sensemaking during crisis (Díez-Vial and Belso-Martinez 2024; Ramli et al. 2023). Our findings suggest that legacy, when enacted through identity practices rather than preserved symbolically, becomes a source of renewal and prosocial orientation rather than inertia.

Finally, the paper adds to the continuing scholarly conversation on the use of narrative analysis in FB research (Boyd et al. 2025; Hoon, Brinkmann, and Baluch 2023) and contributes to the literature on organizational uses of the past (Wadhwani et al. 2018), showing how FBs creatively draw on historical identity narratives to navigate contemporary disruption. Thus, echoing recent work on the role of place and local belonging in entrepreneurial identity reconstruction and community resilience (Li, Barros, and Blackburn 2025; Redhead and Bika 2025). Our study responds to calls to better understand how legacy can be deliberately cultivated and reinterpreted to sustain both economic viability and social impact across generations (Radu-Lefebvre et al. 2025). Our work indicates that FBs, through their

intergenerational continuity and community embeddedness, offer fertile ground for examining how values and adaptive behaviours converge to sustain economic viability and social impact (Köhn, Lehmann-Hiepler, and Moog 2021).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Social entrepreneurship

There is growing interest among organizations in addressing social and environmental challenges while scaling their operations to achieve broader social impact (Klarin and Suseno 2023). This trend has fuelled the development of social entrepreneurship, commonly defined as the pursuit of social value creation through entrepreneurial means (Mair, Robinson, and Hockerts 2006). It is increasingly viewed as a critical mechanism for addressing global issues such as poverty, climate change, and public health (Feldner and Fyke 2016), and has gained recognition as both a legitimate academic field (Bonfanti et al. 2024; Klarin and Suseno 2023) and a particularly salient topic of scholarly inquiry (Janssen, Fayolle, and Wuilaume 2018). Recent studies highlight that social entrepreneurship manifests not only in formal ventures but in fragile or precarious ecosystems, where resource constraints foster solidarity-based and community-anchored innovation (Douaihy, Messeghem, and Nakara 2026).

Social entrepreneurship assumes that organizations must balance social missions with economic constraints (Bacq and Lumpkin 2014) and face the challenge of pursuing frequently conflicting goals (Wry and York 2017). Research has linked social value creation to organizational identity (e.g. Boers and Nordqvist 2020; Moss et al. 2011), a conceptual connection that is not surprising, given that identity building occurs within the context of social relationships (Wry and York 2017).

2.2. Organizational identity

Organizational identity refers to the beliefs organizational members hold about what is central, enduring, and distinctive about their organization (Albert and Whetten 1985). It is a shared interpretive framework that guides members' understanding of their work and provides coherence over time (Fiol 1991; Gioia 2012). Identity is not static or symbolic; it is enacted through practices and decisions (Dutton and Dukerich 1991), and plays a crucial role in shaping how members interpret the environment, evaluate options, and act, especially in periods of uncertainty or transformation (Gioia and Thomas 1996; Ravasi and Schultz 2006). Evidence also suggests that organizational identity can foster adaptive capacities in crisis contexts. For example, Lyu et al. (2020) show that organizational identity positively influenced work engagement among frontline nurses during COVID-19, both directly and indirectly through the mediation of psychological resilience, underscoring identity's role in mobilizing both cognitive and emotional resources for action.

Organizational identity informs how organizations understand themselves and engage with external environments (Clark et al. 2010; Dhalla 2007). It shapes internal behaviours, frames strategic choices, and underpins efforts to navigate change while maintaining coherence (Clark et al. 2010; Dhalla 2007; Ravasi and Phillips 2011; Sheep et al. 2023). Complementing this view, research emphasizes that identity continuity interacts with psychological and emotional capacities to sustain entrepreneurial action under adversity (Klyver and Steffens 2025). To contribute to explain how organizational identity is sustained, contested, and transformed over time, we explore how identity is affected by crises, moments that critically define 'who' an organization is, namely cosmological episodes (Weick 2009; Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005) that suspend established routines and confront organizations with a choice between sticking to habitual ways of thinking or unplanned responses.

2.3. Organizational identity and social entrepreneurship in family firms

The intersection of organizational identity and social entrepreneurship in the context of long-standing FBs offers a rich and underexplored area of inquiry (Boers and Nordqvist 2020). Identity anchors purpose (Whetten, Godfrey, and Gioia 1998), and social entrepreneurship provides a context in which identity is deployed to pursue mission-driven impact (Ormiston and Seymour 2011). Examining how identity evolves allows us to understand how FBs navigate uncertainty, maintain continuity, and drive social innovation across generations (Köhn, Lehmann-Hiepler, and Moog 2021). Organizational identity shapes how FBs perceive and respond to challenges, acting as both a cognitive frame and a normative compass (Hatum et al. 2012).

In social entrepreneurship, firms must dynamically balance social missions with economic viability (Wry and York 2017), often in complex, resource-poor environments (Bacq and Lumpkin 2014). As this lens suggests, identity is not static; it evolves through practices and repeated engagement with stakeholders. Social entrepreneurship provides an ideal context for observing this evolution, as it requires continuous responsiveness to societal needs while maintaining a clear purpose.

In this work, we empirically derive a theoretical model that connects organizational identity and social entrepreneurship in FBs. We show that identity is central to sustaining FBs' social mission over time. Thus, we argue that founding logics remain active in FBs long after their founding stage. Founding stories and values are not merely symbolic; they are invoked in moments of strategic decision-making, particularly when firms face identity-threatening challenges or external shocks. Identity is used to solve problems – not only at inception but across generations – as it guides the firm's interpretation of uncertainty and mobilization of resources (including normative resources, such as values; e.g. Espedal and Carlsen 2024) towards mission-aligned outcomes. In doing so, we emphasize the identity-based view of how social purpose is sustained and updated over time. This perspective foregrounds identity not as static but as continuously (re)constructed through narrative work – particularly in FBs, where past, present, and future are tightly interwoven. Ultimately, we argue that long-lived FB provide an ideal setting for studying these dynamics, offering new insights into how enduring values and adaptive behaviours coexist in organizations that seek to create economic *and* social value.

3. Method

3.1. Research setting and context

The Azores, an autonomous Portuguese archipelago located in the North Atlantic, are renowned for their volcanic landscapes, cultural richness, and remote setting – approximately 1,500 km west of Lisbon (see Supplementary Material: Appendix A). Divided into three island groups, the Central Group includes Faial, home to the iconic PCS, near the port of Horta. Founded in 1918 by Henrique Azevedo, the café evolved from a craft shop into a famed haven for sailors and travellers. In the late 1930s, Henrique's son, José, while working aboard the HMS Lusitania II, earned the nickname 'Peter' from the homesick captain, a name that stuck for life. In 1944, Peter joined the café full-time amid a surge of wartime maritime traffic. Horta, a neutral port during World War II, became a vital stop for shipwreck survivors, the injured, and others seeking aid. Café Sport became known for welcoming all – regardless of origin or need – with warmth and assistance.

After the war, a new wave of recreational sailors arrived, drawn by adventure and community. Peter and Henrique offered medical help and information, building strong bonds with visitors. The café, adorned with nautical mementoes and signed flags, grew into a symbol of seafaring tradition.

Its signature gin and 'tosta mista' became icons. Renowned sailors like Eric Tabarly, Jacques Yves Cousteau, and Joshua Slocum have immortalized the café in their tales.

3.2. COVID-19 and the port of Horta: crisis, continuity, and community in the Azores

In March 2020, as COVID-19 spread, the regional government aligned with national measures by closing non-essential services, restricting movement, and suspending flights. In this context, the Port of Horta – long a waypoint for transatlantic sailors – experienced a unique crisis. Global marina closures had left hundreds of sailors adrift, unable to return home after fleeing the Caribbean before hurricane season began. Supplies dwindled, and safe harbours became scarce (see Supplementary Material: Appendix B and C). In the face of this humanitarian emergency, José Henrique Azevedo, grandson of PCS's founder, stepped in to carry forward a century-old legacy of maritime solidarity. With the marina technically closed, PCS pivoted into a lifeline, supporting over 1,500 boats with food, medicine, and even pregnancy tests.

3.3. Data collection

We conducted an online ethnographic study, also known as virtual ethnography (Hine 2008; Skågeby 2011), from March 2020 to December 2021. The study utilized various social media platforms (e.g. Instagram and Facebook), websites (e.g. Peterscafé.com, The Guardian, Sicnoticias.com, BBC.com, TripAdvisor.com, Cardápio.menu), and video content (e.g. YouTube, RTP.pt). Hine (2008, 65) described virtual ethnography as 'in, of, and through the virtual'. We focused on followers' voices, whose perspectives were readily available as naturally occurring data. We analysed multiple followers' perceptions of such a singular experience through these digital sources. The virtual ethnography was supplemented by an onsite investigation at PCS, which included four unstructured interviews conducted in December 2021 with the owner, his son, his nephew, and one employee.

New interviews were conducted in May 2024 to gather the interpretations of active participants regarding the process from a temporal distance. Non-participant observation complemented the data collection by observing the location and the consumer experience. We also collected data from various virtual publications: (i) local public access websites containing consumer comments about 'Peter Café Sport'; (ii) selected international websites featuring reports from different nationalities, cultures, and languages about PCS; and (iii) Nautic websites, in addition to the official website of the coffee shop. Public information published on the café's official social media platforms, such as Instagram (@petercafesport), Facebook (Petercafesport), and YouTube, was also obtained, with content selected that reports the phenomena under study. Additionally, official information from Silveira's (2018) book was utilized to contextualize the café's history alongside archival data. We have also made a significant effort to incorporate testimonies from individuals who have directly benefited from PCS. However, a significant challenge has emerged: many of these individuals live at sea for extended periods and lack regular or reliable communication, making it extremely difficult to contact them. To overcome this, we examined photographs on PCS's official website that featured several individuals assisted by PCS. We cross-referenced the boat names visible in these pictures and conducted online searches to locate associated social media pages. We then reached out through private messages to request interviews. We received no responses.

We analysed 88 Instagram and 195 Facebook posts, including comments, number of likes and shares, and use of hashtags related to PCS. The comments represent the voices and experiences of those whom the PCS staff has helped. All non-English comments were translated into English, with the authors' identities kept anonymous (all posts mentioned can be found in Supplementary Material: Appendix D).

3.4. Data analysis

We adopted an inductive and interpretive approach (Brewer 2000; Gioia 2021; Magnani and Gioia 2023) to identify conceptual categories grounded in participants' lived experiences. We followed the Gioia template (Gioia 2021) (Figure 1).

In the first stage, we coded textual fragments (Eldh, Årestedt, and Berterö 2020; Saldaña 2013) related to family involvement and identity during COVID-19. Narrative and document analysis techniques

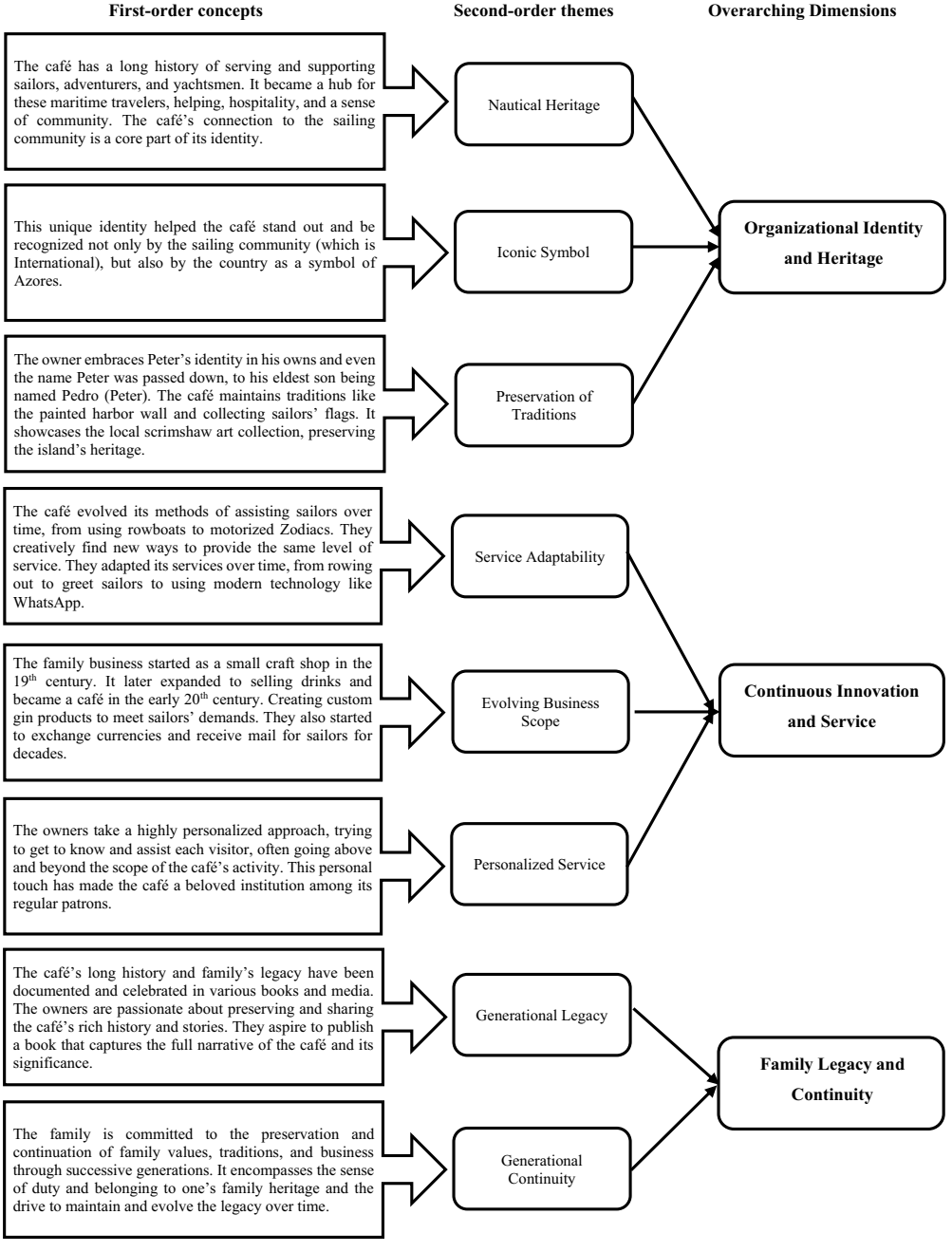

Figure 1. Data structure.

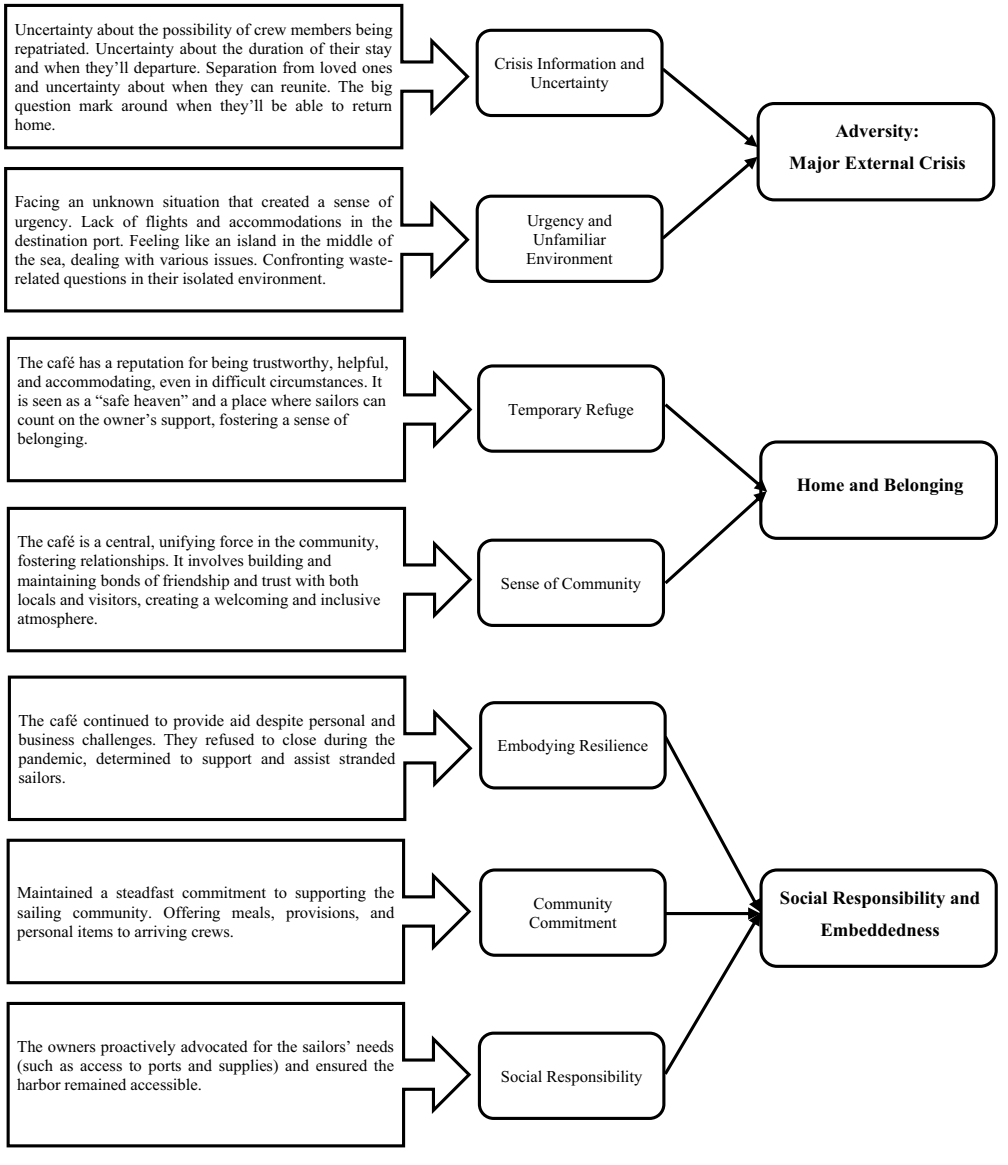

Figure 1. (Continued).

supported the coding (Creswell and Poth 2017; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2015). Initial coding was done by the first author, with co-authors independently reviewing and reconciling discrepancies. In stage two, we distiled first-order concepts into 15 second-order themes, which offered abstract, theory-informed interpretations (Corley and Gioia 2011). For example, the theme 'nautical heritage' encapsulated concepts related to PCS's historical service to sailors. Our analysis aimed to surface emergent or underexplored concepts relevant to this unique setting (Gioia et al. 2010).

In the third stage, the second-order themes were consolidated into six overarching dimensions that encapsulate the essence of the findings at a higher level of abstraction. The analysis resulted in the following final categories: (i) organizational identity and heritage, (ii) continuous innovation and service, (iii) family legacy and continuity, (iv) adversity: major external crisis, (v) home and belonging, and (vi) social responsibility and embeddedness. The next section elaborates on these findings.

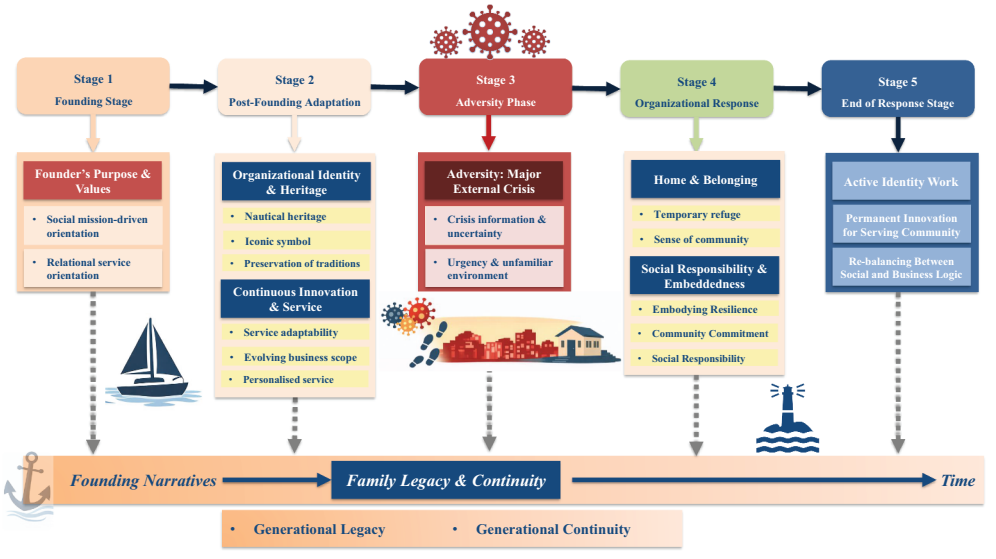

Figure 2. Model of hybrid logics shaped and preserved by founding narratives and identity legacies.

4. Findings

We outline five sequential stages in the evolution of a mission-driven, socially embedded organization, illustrating how founding values, identity, and purpose evolve – and how they are reactivated and updated during crises to shape the organizational response (Figure 2).

4.1. Stage 1: founding stage

During the founding period, the café's identity was influenced by the founder's sense of social responsibility and his engagement with the sailing community. This social mission-driven orientation shaped early practices and decisions, embedding a logic that prioritized service, hospitality, and relational connection with community alongside commercial activity. As José Azevedo explained:

> What we did was important. It showed that we are here and want to help people. (. . .) When he realised the ships were waiting for a doctor, my father knew it was not out of malice. There were few doctors on the island. (. . .) So, my father would go on a boat or yacht to check if everything was okay, come back, ask for approval, and communicate with them. (. . .) That thing my father did—going on board, greeting people, talking, introducing himself with the café—made a difference.

The café thus functioned not only as a business, but also as an informal point of friendly support for those arriving by sea. The founder's actions, as described above, illustrate how a socially oriented logic became embedded in the café's early operations and identity.

4.2. Stage 2: post-founding adaptation stage

Following the founder's departure and amidst a shifting external environment, the café entered a phase of adaptation. While the core values and identity established in the founding period remained present, they became less explicitly articulated. As Mariana, the founder's great-granddaughter, observed: 'We continue to maintain the tradition and try to welcome those who visit us. It's big shoes for us to fill. We do our best'.

4.2.1. Organizational identity and heritage

The dimension Organizational Identity and Heritage expresses the café's enduring connection to maritime tradition, cultural symbolism, and commitment to preserving organizational legacy. Its longstanding support for sailors has shaped its identity as a global sailing hub and an emblem of the Azores, recognized both locally and internationally (see, for instance, Pacheco 2021; Schulz 2025). Rituals, namesakes, and cultural artefacts – such as the harbour wall, sailors' flags, and scrimshaw – embody a living heritage that honours its past and sustains its identity across generations. This dimension unfolds through three themes: (i) *Nautical Heritage*, (ii) *Iconic Symbol*, and (iii) *Preservation of Traditions*.

4.2.1.1. Nautical heritage. A core aspect of the café's identity is its historic bond with the sailing community. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized that the café 'was always a place for sailors' and 'a refuge for those at sea'. This identity was forged through acts of hospitality and assistance to seafarers arriving in the Azores, fostering a reputation as a trusted, supportive hub: 'In the early days, they would go out in a rowboat to greet sailors. It wasn't about making money. It was about welcoming people'. The connection runs deep, shaping not only the café's role but also the identities of those who run it. As José Azevedo shared:

> In 2018, I made a trip from the Azores to the Caribbean because I also wanted to become a full member of the club, because I represented the club but was not a member, I had not made such a trip, so I did.

This act reflects a commitment to authentic belonging, not just symbolic but enacted through experience. The act of undertaking a transatlantic journey was not driven by commercial necessity but by a desire to remain authentic and connected to the identity the café represents. Through such gestures, the café's legacy as a node of connection among global adventurers continues to be reinforced and embodied.

4.2.1.2. Iconic symbol. Over time, the café's deep connection to the maritime world evolved into broader recognition, both within the sailing community and among the Azorean public. As José Azevedo puts it:

> I began to understand the importance of the café to many of these people, which is normal, just as if we like something in a unique place, we want to go see it. For sailors, the café became a special place. The café's name, imagery, and stories became part of the cultural identity of the Azores itself. Through its consistent mission and visibility, the café transcended its local function to become an internationally recognised symbol, with visitors describing it as "a little embassy for sailors" and "a place everyone talks about when you're crossing the Atlantic".

4.2.1.3. Preservation of traditions. A key aspect of the café's identity is the intentional preservation of cultural and familial traditions, which contributes to the café's unique atmosphere and continuity. The founder's legacy is passed down not only through symbols but via generational continuity: 'The name Peter wasn't just the name of the café—it became part of the family. The son is also Pedro. It's a tradition' (José Azevedo). Material elements such as sailors' flags, scrimshaw, and the painted harbour wall serve as curated expressions of this heritage. Personal stories also reinforce continuity. A Facebook Post recalls a memorable story, where Peter served as an interpreter during a marriage proposal between a Dutch sailor and an Azorian girl, highlighting the café's ongoing role in connecting people: 'This was the beginning of an old-fashioned love story! Thank you very much for the fantastic memory! 💌 🤳' (Facebook Post 28). Such moments, along with the preservation of both tangible and intangible elements, serve as a symbolic connection between the past and present, supporting the transmission of founding values and maintaining the café's identity over time. From this strong foundation of identity and heritage, the café was able to navigate changing demands – not by abandoning its traditions, but by innovating around them in subtle, service-oriented ways.

4.2.2. Continuous innovation and service

The overarching dimension Continuous Innovation and Service reflects the café's ability to evolve and enhance its offerings while maintaining a consistent commitment to serving its community. It highlights the gradual yet continuous improvements introduced over time – from adapting how sailors are greeted, to incorporating modern tools like WhatsApp, and expanding the business from a small coffee shop to a multifaceted service hub. The café responds to emerging needs with creativity, such as crafting custom gin or handling mail and currency exchange for sailors. Central to this evolution is the personalized service, where owners build lasting relationships with patrons, reinforcing the café's reputation as a trusted and beloved institution. This dimension is characterized by three interrelated themes: (i) *Service Adaptability*, (ii) *Evolving Business Scope*, and (iii) *Personalised Service*.

4.2.2.1. Service adaptability. A key marker of this phase was the café's ability to adjust its service to the sailing community while preserving its underlying mission. Adaptation occurred continuously, responding to changes in communication and technology without abandoning its relational ethos. Greeting incoming sailors evolved from rowboats to motorized inflatable boats, such as Zodiacs, and more recently to digital interaction. The café embraced online platforms to maintain connection and visibility:

> To all those who dare to say that this internet thingy is only for young people: 101 years old and here we are! www.petercafesport.com . . . now, who can explain to me what the hell a TikTok is? 🤣 (Post 159 – Facebook)

These shifts reflected not a change in purpose, but a practical extension of longstanding service values into new formats and channels. It demonstrates a service orientation that embraces change while maintaining authenticity. In this sense, adaptability went beyond logistics – it also included tone, voice, and the café's presence in the digital sphere.

4.2.2.2. Evolving business scope. The café gradually expanded its services by responding to community needs rather than through formal strategic diversification. Originating as a small craft shop, it became a café and later introduced its own gin. One longstanding practice is holding mail for sailors – a tradition started by the founder, Ernesto Azevedo, and continued today by José Azevedo, offering access beyond regular postal hours. José Azevedo, like his father and grandfather, offers it free of charge.

> BV❤BV❤BV Did these letters arrive at the Crew of Thor Heyerdahl until they left Horta last week, or are you still carrying the letters for them until they come back? My daughter is at Thor Heyerdahl at the moment, and one of the letters is addressed to her BV😇 💌. (Comment to Instagram Post Number 86)

This unique service has become so intertwined with the café's identity that in 2004, the Portuguese postal service issued a commemorative series of three stamps honouring PCS and its contributions to international correspondence. More recently, recognizing a growing appetite for meaningful content and emotional connection, the café launched a podcast to capture the oral histories shared within its walls: 'When they [sailors] started telling these stories, I thought, this is it! (. . .). The privilege of being at home, working, sitting at a table, and accessing such stories' (Mariana). Strategic storytelling and digital content extend the café's reach from a physical gathering space to a digital platform, reflecting a form of identity expression rooted in tradition but open to new forms of engagement, keeping the legacy alive while allowing it to grow in new directions. These incremental expansions reflect the business's ongoing sensitivity to its users, even as the founding narrative became less pronounced.

4.2.2.3. Personalized service. Despite expanding its offerings, PCS maintained a consistent focus on personalized, relational service. Staff and family members often responded with spontaneous acts of care that reinforced the café's identity as more than a commercial space, as a place of human

warmth and emotional resonance. José Azevedo recalled an encounter with a Swiss yacht that arrived on a Sunday – a day when most businesses were closed: 'I'm from Peter's Café Sport – if you need anything, I'm at your service. (. . .) Can you get me a cushion?' Rather than postpone the request, José brought one from home, with his mother saying, 'No need to say, here's a new one!' Reflecting on the gesture, he noted: 'That cushion was much more useful – and more remembered – than those dozens of papers on board'. This approach, grounded in attentiveness over efficiency, is further echoed in his comment: 'I could have had a business that would have been more profitable economically . . . but no, we're a little café (. . .), and we can live well'. This story encapsulates the café's underlying service philosophy: meaningful gestures, not scale or efficiency, are what truly define its value. As José concluded:

> I could have had a business that would have been more profitable economically . . . but no, we're a little café that sells coffees for €0.70, beer, gin, a few meals—but we can live well, fortunately.

This ongoing commitment to personalized, attentive service – offered not as a strategy but as a way of being – helps explain why the café remains an important local institution. It continues to foster bonds of trust, reciprocity, and emotional connection that are difficult to replicate in more conventional or commercial settings. Through everyday acts of generosity and relational care, the café not only preserves customer loyalty but also its identity as a place where people genuinely feel at home. This emotional resonance – crafted through consistency, empathy, and trust – created a strong foundation for identity continuity, even as routines evolved.

4.2.3. Family legacy and continuity

This overarching dimension captures the deep-rooted commitment to preserving the café's history, values, and identity across generations. It reflects both a pride in the past and a responsibility towards the future, as the family actively documents its story, honours its traditions, and prepares the next generation to carry the legacy forward. Through public storytelling, aspirations to publish a comprehensive narrative, and the continued involvement of family members in the business, the café becomes more than a place – it stands as a living testament to enduring family heritage and intergenerational dedication. This dimension emerged from two second-order themes: (i) *Generational Legacy*,, and (ii) *Generational Continuity*.

4.2.3.1. Generational legacy. The café's long and storied history has been carefully preserved and actively shared through various means, including books, articles, documentaries, stamps, and now digital content such as podcasts and social media. This legacy work is not accidental; it is a purposeful act of remembering and transmitting meaning. José Henrique Azevedo, the third-generation owner, detailed how this dedication to preserving the family narrative shaped the very ethos of PCS:

> My grandfather would row out to meet the boats, bring their documents ashore and check if they were okay. That was a form of welcome that became tradition. That's how we became known—not by talking, but by doing.

This commitment to storytelling extends beyond nostalgia – it is a means of grounding identity and legitimizing continuity. This legacy work reflects a deliberate and dynamic process of transmitting meaning across generations:

> Offered by Dutch war-drafters, the oceanic blue paint (. . .) became a symbol of appreciation from those who found shelter inside our walls (. . .). We grow, we share and bond: the antidote to isolation, the true tonic of life. (. . .) This is the spirit we try to capture in each one of our bottles. (Facebook Post Number 15 and Instagram Post Number 75)

The café links its visual identity (with its blue façade) to acts of service and emotional connection, reinforcing how tangible elements (e.g. the building, labels) serve as vessels of intangible meaning (e.g. shelter, memory, gratitude) – the physical space functions as a living archive. In Facebook Post

Number. 37, the café is shown adorned with maritime flags, photos, and nautical artefacts – items that do not merely serve as decoration but act as vessels of collective memory, representing tributes, stories, and gestures of gratitude from generations of visitors.

Legacy is also preserved through longstanding relationships with patrons. In Instagram Post 66, the café shares the story of Graham and Avril Johnson, long-distance sailors who have been circumnavigating the world for 18 years. They say, 'It wasn't planned to last this long, but there's still so much to see'. They visited in 1986, 1988, 1990, and again in 1994 for the café's 75th anniversary, buying a t-shirt on each occasion. In 2020, they were gifted new shirts with the promise: 'We offer them two new shirts, with the promise of wearing them on Peter's 125th birthday in 2043! (. . .) We will be here to welcome them!' This exchange illustrates how the café's legacy is co-authored by its community over time. Through these acts – linking objects to memory, anchoring identity in both physical and digital spaces, and sustaining personal relationships – the café actively maintains an evolving, multigenerational investment in making the past meaningful in the present and projecting it into the future.

4.2.3.2. Generational continuity. Efforts to sustain PCS extend beyond memory preservation to actively preparing the next generation. As José Henrique explains, 'It became almost evident that I had to continue. I would feel a bit frustrated if PCS ended with me'. His comment reflects both personal commitment and a broader stewardship mindset: 'I would like in the future for there to be two of them (out of three) staying . . . ' This aspiration is enacted through the gradual inclusion of younger family members in operational and digital roles. Succession is framed not as entitlement but as socialization into a shared mindset – anchored in service, care, and continuity. Family members learn to act as hosts, historians, and guardians, embedding values through practice rather than formalized succession plans. Although the founding narrative became less explicitly referenced during this period, it remained evident in the café's everyday routines and value-driven decisions. This steady, quiet evolution allowed the business to adapt without losing its identity, setting the stage for future renewal. The family legacy thus served as a guiding force, ensuring that innovation remained aligned with the founder's spirit.

The second stage of PCS's evolution reflects a period of identity continuity through quiet adaptation. While the founding narrative began to fade in explicit articulation, its essence persisted in daily interactions, symbolic heritage, and continuous service innovations. The balance between social and business logic, once made explicit by the founder, became more implicit – gradually tilting towards a latent social logic and a focus on continuity through family legacy. This subtle shift set the conditions for the identity reawakening. Rather than being a moment of rupture, this stage reveals how organizations can evolve organically, through slow adaptation and intergenerational stewardship.

4.3. Stage 3: Adversity phase

The third stage is activated by adversity – a major external shock that disrupts routines, threatens continuity, and demands swift moral clarity. In this case, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a powerful inflexion point that reactivated PCS's latent social purpose, prompting the organization to respond spontaneously, with care, and with a commitment to the community. Unlike the previous stage, this was a moment of identity reawakening, where purpose was no longer latent but vividly reasserted in action:

> Peter received a phone call from a training ship in the port. They could not come ashore or buy food for the 30 teenagers learning to live at sea. The solution was simple: help as they did about 70 years ago. A movement was created, which the French called La Résistance. It was a free delivery service for food, water, diesel, medicine, and

> anything else they needed. Food from the restaurant was also served, helping the place survive the pandemic. In five months of operation, there are countless stories. The team at Peter's extended a hand to about 800 boats. (Câmara 2020)

4.3.1. Adversity: major external crisis

The dimension Adversity: Major External Crisis reflects how PCS responded to sudden global disruption and operational challenges, particularly during the pandemic. Stranded sailors faced heightened uncertainty – unsure of repatriation, cut off from families, and navigating daily life in an isolated setting with limited resources. In this context, the café served as a stabilizing force, offering structure and support amid ambiguity. This overarching dimension unfolds through two interconnected themes: (i) *Crisis Information and Uncertainty*, and (ii) *Urgency and Unfamiliar Environment.*

4.3.1.1. Crisis information and uncertainty. During the pandemic, global sailors – many with families – were stranded at sea as ports closed and borders tightened. The approaching hurricane season increased urgency: 'With the official start of hurricane season on June 1, it became imperative for vessels to leave the Caribbean area' (The Guardian). Reports highlighted extreme hardship: 'Families with young children have been threatened with arrest, had their boats seized, or were towed out to open water for attempting to anchor in sheltered bays in search of food and water. Thousands have been left with nowhere to go, undertaking perilous voyages' (The Guardian). Against this backdrop, the Azores – and PCS in particular – emerged as a critical refuge. As Duarte, José Azevedo's nephew, recalled: 'There was this big question mark around when they'd be able to go home, and some hadn't even had a shower in weeks. They didn't know what was waiting for them at the next port – if anything at all'. The café became more than a local establishment; it functioned as a trusted source of guidance and reassurance in an environment marked by uncertainty.

4.3.1.2. Urgency and unfamiliar environment. The crisis was not only one of uncertainty but also of disorientation and logistical breakdown. Sailors arrived at an unfamiliar environment with no accommodations available and limited access to supplies or services. In response, the café reactivated its legacy of personalized, community-based service, this time under high-stress and high-risk conditions.

> Countries along the Atlantic's eastern shores have been turning away boats looking for shelter. (. . .) However, grateful sailors have been reporting that (. . .) the maritime institution Peter Café Sport has been taking food, medical supplies and marine parts to anchored boats. (The Guardian)

Far from retreating, Peter became more operationally present and socially engaged, offering essential services that many official institutions could not provide.

4.4. Stage 4: Organizational response

Following the immediate shock of the crisis, PCS entered a new phase – not of retreat or survivalism, but of profound organizational activation. This stage marks a critical moment of identity activation, expressed through a sense of home and belonging, as well as an intensified commitment to social responsibility and embeddedness. These responses were not orchestrated through formal strategy but driven by deeply held values and decades of lived practice.

Rather than protecting profits or reducing operations, the café leaned into its historical mission – reaffirming its core purpose through deliberate actions. This included facilitating access to hot showers, food, and even emotional support. João, member of the family's second generation, recalled:

> These people arrived here after three weeks without a shower. The smell was not pleasant. My father quickly realised that it was not a problem. These were cultured, educated people with money who might have looked like beggars but were not asking for charity.

Despite some local scepticism, the café upheld its inclusive mindset:

> We offered them drinks, and they would then ask if they could shower. We provided towels, soap, and hot showers for a nominal fee. They were satisfied, and then they would start sharing their stories, some orally, others in writing. (João Azevedo)

Through this response, PCS did more than offer practical assistance – it created a temporary sense of community in a moment of global displacement. The space became a haven for displaced sailors. In doing so, the café reaffirmed its founding mission not through words, but through action – transforming adversity into an opportunity to embody its deepest values.

4.4.1. Home and belonging

This dimension captures the café's role as a trusted refuge and social anchor for both sailors and the local community. It reflects the café's reputation as a safe, welcoming space where people feel supported, especially during trying times. More than just a physical place, it offers emotional comfort and connection – fostering lasting bonds, mutual trust, and a sense of inclusion. Through its consistent hospitality and care, the café became a home away from home, where everyone who entered felt they belonged. This dimension emerged from two interrelated second-order themes: (i) *Temporary Refuge* and (ii) *Sense of Community*.

4.4.1.1. Temporary refuge. As borders closed and ports across the Atlantic rejected vessels, PCS distinguished itself by offering immediate, unconditional support to stranded sailors. Many arrived in the Azores after weeks at sea, physically depleted and emotionally distressed. José Azevedo recalled:

> These people arrived here after three weeks without a shower. The smell was not pleasant. My father quickly realised that it was not a problem. These were cultured, educated people with money who might have looked like beggars but were not asking for charity.

In response, the café extended hospitality without question. PCS provided drinks, soap, towels, and showers for a symbolic fee – an act that upheld sailors' dignity at a time when many had experienced marginalization elsewhere. This reputation as a trustworthy and accommodating space fostered a strong sense of emotional safety. Sailors knew they could count on Peter's to meet their most immediate needs – not just with supplies, but with kindness. Duarte described how word spread: 'The first boats communicated to others, saying, "Come, Peter will take care of you".' Such acts established the café as a reliable sanctuary and emotional anchor for those navigating crisis. Sailors themselves echoed this sentiment. As Keith, captain of Kinetic of Cardiff, wrote:

> I have been sailing around for the last 30 years, and this has been the very best service, completely voluntary given, I have ever received in any location in my life … Delivered pharmaceuticals, sorted Internet connection, solved some chandelier issues … Just perfect. (Facebook Post Number 142)

By offering both material aid and human empathy, PCS became known not only as a port of call but as a safe haven in the middle of the ocean.

4.4.1.2. Sense of community. The café's role during the pandemic also reaffirmed its deeper social function: as a unifying space that bridges the local and the global, the transient and the rooted. Even under strained conditions, PCS cultivated a sense of belonging – not just through service, but through relationship-building. This relational orientation extended to both locals and foreign sailors, strengthening the café's status as a community hub – acts of care generated reciprocity, storytelling, and shared memory. Sailors who had once been strangers quickly became part of a wider network of friendship and solidarity. João noted the emotional continuity across generations: 'It was incredible

for us because we showed that even after 100 years, three generations later, we still cared'. This community spirit was not an accident – it was the result of consistent efforts to connect, listen, and create a welcoming atmosphere, even in the most challenging times. As stories circulated, messages were passed between marinas across the ocean, and photographs of sailors wearing Peter's symbolic beanie were shared online, reaffirming the café's identity as a community anchor. In essence, PCS functioned as a home, not only because of its permanence but also through its presence. It was not the length of stay that mattered. This enduring sense of belonging, cultivated over decades and reactivated during crisis, became a critical source of stability and meaning for all those who passed through.

4.4.2. Social responsibility and embeddedness

Social Responsibility and Embeddedness reflect the café's commitment to serving both its immediate community and the broader sailing network, especially in times of hardship. This dimension highlights the owners' resilience and moral duty to support others – even at personal or financial cost. From keeping the café open during the pandemic to providing essential goods and advocating for sailors' rights, their actions go beyond business – they reflect a deeply rooted sense of social responsibility. The place is not just in the community; it is *of* the community, embedded in its social fabric and trusted as a force for solidarity and care. This dimension is composed of three second-order themes: (i) *Embodying Resilience,* (ii) *Community Commitment*, and (iii) *Social Responsibility*.

4.4.2.1. Embodying resilience. When most businesses were closing their doors, PCS chose to remain open – not for profit, but for purpose. Despite significant operational and financial pressures, the owners refused to scale back their efforts to support sailors in need. Their resilience was not only about surviving as a business, but about persisting in their duty to others: 'It was exhausting', recalled José Azevedo. 'My nephews, Duarte and Filipe, handled most of the sea part, while I stayed more at the café . . . We delivered items until after midnight'. This persistence in the face of adversity reflected a commitment to the café's founding values. Rather than waiting for official support or instructions, the team acted autonomously and consistently – often improvising with limited resources – to keep their doors open and their community cared for.

4.4.2.2. Community commitment. The café's response during the pandemic reflected not a new initiative, but the deepening of a commitment extended beyond individual customers to a global, transient network of sailors who felt connected to PCS. Meals, personal hygiene items, provisions, fuel, boat parts, and even medical supplies were sourced, organized, and delivered without hesitation. As Duarte emphasized: 'What we did for the boats was everything . . . food, medication, parts to repair the boat, even pregnancy tests. Everything they needed was done'. But the support offered was not merely logistical, but relational – grounded in a sense of solidarity and shared experience:

> Almost 50 boats in Horta's Bay delighted us with a melodic symphony . . . as a token of appreciation for our latest efforts to support the sailing community stranded in Horta (. . .) Every day, our team, on land and at sea, starts early in the morning and ends late at night . . . Regardless of the weather, of the long working hours, and associated exhaustion (Facebook Post Number 145)

This sense of duty – practical and emotional – reinforced PCS's position as an anchor point for those navigating not just maritime routes, but also moments of vulnerability and dislocation. However, at the heart of the café's actions was a longstanding commitment to the sailing community. The crisis did not create this ethos – it revealed and amplified it.

4.4.2.3. Social responsibility. PCS's embeddedness also meant assuming roles typically associated with public institutions, acting as an informal advocate for stranded sailors during the pandemic. When official policies were unclear or inadequate, the café engaged directly with local authorities to

secure safe access and provide essential support. As José Azevedo recalled: 'We talked to the commander and local authorities, the captaincy and the regional government. And we got authorisation not to board the ship but to approach and fulfil their needs the same way'. This proactive intervention was not driven by formal obligation, but by a longstanding sense of responsibility for the well-being of the sailing community. In this way, social responsibility at PCS was not abstract – it was embodied in action. Their response to the crisis demonstrated how deeply the organization was embedded in its environment, both physically and relationally. The café acted not because it was told to, but because it felt compelled to – a reflection of identity as much as strategy. Throughout the crisis, profit was consciously deprioritised: 'I only managed . . . I and hundreds of others . . . we only managed to endure without laying anyone off because there was government support' (José Azevedo). Instead, action was guided by a moral imperative to serve. The café remained open when others shut down, taking on personal and financial risk and working tirelessly to support others. As Duarte noted:

> Yes, but this also takes us back to our origins. We became famous because my grandfather . . . would row out to meet [the boats], see if they were okay, and bring their documents back to the island for clearance.

As João Azevedo explained, this continuity of purpose spanned generations and was deeply meaningful: 'Even after 100 years, three generations later, we still cared'. The café's legacy was not just something to preserve – it was something to live by. João reflected further:

> If necessary, we will be there again, which is great. For the brand and the sailors who visit us, knowing that 30, 40, 50 years later, we are still doing the same if needed.

As the most acute phase of the crisis waned, the café's response revealed not a reinvention but a reactivation of long-held values, a reaffirmation of an identity anchored in service, solidarity, and community embeddedness. As Duarte reflected:

> As an institution . . . we couldn't, we can't—in such a desperate time, most of the people who visit us are sailors—we couldn't turn our backs and say no . . . It's not our responsibility.

The café's actions crystallized its self-understanding as more than a business – as a moral actor within a global sailing network. This response stage thus set the foundation for a new chapter, as the urgency receded and the organization transitioned from crisis-mode towards a slower, reflective rebalancing of roles, routines, and identity in the post-crisis context.

4.5. Stage 5: End of response stage

In the aftermath of the crisis, PCS transitioned into a new stage – not a return to 'business as usual', but a deliberate process of reflection, recalibration, and rebalancing between social and commercial logics. The organization consolidated the lessons of the crisis into long-term practices through two key processes: Active Identity Work and the Permanent Innovation for Serving Community. The result was not merely recovery, but strategic transformation. The café re-emerged as a more self-aware, values-driven enterprise-one where identity became an explicit guiding force for future action.

4.5.1. Active identity work

The crisis had powerfully reactivated the café's founding narrative. Now, that narrative was consciously curated, reinforced, and carried forward. The team engaged in storytelling, not only internally but also in its public-facing communication. Pandemic-era experiences were now commemorated through photos, podcasts, social media tributes, and guest interactions. These stories were treated not as isolated memories but as organizational anchors: 'Looking back, someone might say it was a marketing strategy . . . But no – it was a necessity' (João Azevedo).

Objects like the yellow pom beanie took on a new role – not only as memorabilia, but as symbols of shared identity and lived values. Through these artefacts and rituals, the café resisted the erosion of purpose that can follow moments of intense change. Instead of letting commercial concerns quietly override mission, they used storytelling and visual symbols to embed identity into everyday decision-making. In short, identity became a strategic resource.

4.5.2. Permanent innovation for serving the community

Some innovations that emerged under pressure were not discarded once the crisis ended. Instead, some were selectively retained because they aligned with and reinforced the organization's core purpose. Logistical innovations such as digital ordering systems, WhatsApp communication with vessels, or new delivery mechanisms became institutionalized tools – blending old-school hospitality with modern responsiveness. The team assessed which crisis-born practices deepened relationships or enhanced service and chose to make them permanent: 'It was a year when I made a loss . . . But for many people, for many years to come, they'll still remember the support they had here. That is important for me. It's the most important thing' (José Azevedo).

4.5.3. Rebalancing between social and business logic

What distinguishes this final stage is a deliberate rebalancing of logics – no longer tilted towards one or the other but actively negotiated in practice. Business logic becomes secondary during the crisis's peak, and social logic supersedes it. But in the aftermath, the organization seeks a dynamic equilibrium that honours both sustainability and social responsibility. This is not a static resolution but an ongoing effort. This final stage marks the stabilization of identity and a rebalancing of purpose and practice. The founding narrative is no longer latent or occasionally recalled – it is now active, embedded, and guiding the organization forward (for additional data, please see Supplementary Material: Appendix E).

In this End of Response Stage, we witness the culmination of a cycle. The café's journey shows how an organization can evolve without losing itself – drawing on the past to shape the future and reaffirming its purpose not only in moments of crisis but also in the everyday. This final stage marks the stabilization of identity, and a rebalancing of purpose and practice. The founding narrative is no longer latent or occasionally recalled – it is now fully active, embedded, and guiding the organization forward.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Some organizations, including private businesses, strive to balance their economic and social missions (Bacq, Janssen, and Noël 2019). The search for this balance is a challenge for all, but even more so for small FBs, often characterized by their close ties to the community in which they operate and by their limited resources (Boers and Ljungkvist 2019; Franco et al. 2014; Miller, Steier, and Le Breton-Miller 2016). We explore how organizational identity sustains social purpose in longstanding FBs.

Drawing on an in-depth case study of PCS, we make four main contributions. First, while most research on social entrepreneurship focuses on formal social enterprises and the early stages of organizations' lives, our work reveals that social entrepreneurship is not exclusively a start-up phenomenon. In the context of a small, longstanding FB, social logics shaped by founders can coexist with economic logics and persist decades after founding. Our study shows how hybrid logics – economic and social – are preserved and reinterpreted in small FBs, firms that may not define themselves as social enterprises but whose actions reveal a deep and sustained commitment to community well-being (Niehm, Swinney, and Miller 2008). In PSC, the social engagement has always been present, since its inception, even before the concept of social entrepreneurship gained popularity. Recent work has expanded this understanding by showing that social entrepreneurship also unfolds in long-established ventures and community-embedded initiatives (Hjorth and Painter

2026). These perspectives align with our observation that PCS's enduring social logic is inextricably linked to its territorial and relational foundations. In an insular and geographically peripheral context, social purpose is not merely a strategic choice but a condition of organizational legitimacy: insularity amplifies moral visibility, interdependence, and community accountability, thereby stabilizing socially oriented identity commitments alongside economic imperatives. Seen through the emerging legacy lens, this endurance suggests that social purpose in longstanding firms is sustained not simply by historical continuity, but by the ongoing enactment and reinterpretation of inherited meanings in practice (Radu-Lefebvre et al. 2025).

The study also shows that founding narratives and family legacy maintain their strategic relevance across generations in small, established, multigenerational FBs, which is a second contributing factor to social entrepreneurship literature. Specifically, the study traces the evolution of PCS across five distinct stages to explain how founder-infused identity enables the sustained enactment of social purpose. Thus, our work reveals that during periods of relative stability, identity was subtly expressed through continuous innovation and heritage preservation. Yet, when faced with a crisis, rather than resorting to external playbooks or economic calculus, the café mobilized internalized values, historical narratives, and tacit knowledge to guide its actions. Actions such as delivering provisions, stranded sailors (fuel, medicine, paperwork, and meals) or adopting symbolic artefacts like the 'La Résistance' beanie were rooted in family legacy and embodied organizational identity. These actions were not spontaneous detours from strategy but enactments of a legacy-based logic that had been cultivated, transmitted, and reinterpreted across generations (Cunha, Cunha, and Kamoche 1999; Hatum et al. 2012; Whetten, Godfrey, and Gioia 1998), a vehicle for both identity reaffirmation and intergenerational continuity (Melewar, Bassett, and Simes 2006). Comparable findings emerge in research on hometown entrepreneurship, which shows how place-based identity and family legacy foster long-term attachment and community reciprocity in business decision-making (Redhead and Bika 2025). In PCS, identity-anchored decision-making in the face of uncertainty also enabled creative problem-solving aligned with the firm's social mission; that is, identity served not just to solve immediate problems but to reaffirm the café's enduring role as a social anchor. Consistent with Burton et al. (2026), such enduring commitments resemble a stabilizing 'moral backbone' that both constrains and enables action across time, anchoring social purpose while allowing adaptive responses.

Third, we respond to calls for more analyses of identity work during crises (Ashforth 2020; Bettinelli et al. 2022) and extend the concept of 'network bricolage' (Baker, Miner, and Eesley 2003; Duymedjian and Rüling 2010; Stinchfield, Nelson, and Wood 2013) by showing that pre-existing relational ties – such as deep embeddedness in a global sailing network – can be activated in later organizational life stages to support crisis response. The activation of pre-existing relational networks mirrors findings on regional emergency networks that emerged during COVID-19, where embedded ties and proximity enhanced collective resilience (Díez-Vial and Belso-Martinez 2024; Silva et al. 2026). Likewise, entrepreneurs' crisis perceptions and psychological capital have been shown to shape adaptive opportunity recognition and organizational progress under duress (Klyver and Steffens 2025). Specifically, the case reveals that in a context of crisis, accumulated social capital, commitments based on legacy, and moral obligations rooted in its history prompted the PSC not to worry about the balance between economic and social logic, but rather to priorise the aid and care for the sailors and the provision of services to a community that felt that café belonged to them. In the post-crisis period, we observed a rebalancing rather than a return to 'normal'. Founding values were rearticulated in digital platforms, everyday routines, and symbolic artefacts. This transition illustrates how identity can be reinterpreted and stabilized after disruption, thereby supporting organizational hybridity and the longevity of social mission (Cennamo et al. 2012; Jaskiewicz, Combs, and Rau 2015). Rather than drifting from its mission, PCS emerged from the crisis more attuned to its dual logic – economic survival and community service – and better able to navigate both. This aligns with evidence that dynamic capabilities and collaborative renewal processes are crucial for SMEs' survival and strategic adaptation in crises (Wang et al. 2024) and that emotional leadership enhances

collective endurance in turbulent times (Ramli et al. 2023). This post-crisis rebalancing illustrates how legacy can function as a generative rather than an inertial force, enabling selective reinterpretation rather than rigidity (Hartwell, Korovkin, and Vershinina 2026; Radu-Lefebvre et al. 2025).

Finally, we contribute to the literature on organizational uses of the past (Wadhwani et al. 2018), showing how a small FB with a long history creatively draw on historical identity narratives to navigate contemporary disruption. Our study reveals that the transgenerational vision of long-lived FBs, their often firm and historically embedded nature in the community, and the founder legacy help explain how family values and organizational behaviours converge to maintain the economic viability and social impact of a small company in the middle of the Atlantic. In doing so, we complement recent psychological and process perspectives on legacy by illustrating how prosocial orientation is sustained not only through individual legacy motives (Goya-Tocchetto, Paek, and Wade-Benzoni 2026), but through organizational practices and relational networks that embed responsibility across generations.

While our research offers insights, it is not without limitations. We consider one case, which may limit the generalizability of findings. Future research should consider a broader range of organizations across different industries and contexts to validate and extend our model. Comparative research may also investigate how hybrid missions unfold within precarious entrepreneurial sub-ecosystems (Douaihy, Messeghem, and Nakara 2026) to assess the transferability of identity-based mechanisms across socio-economic contexts. Additionally, we focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, a jolt that may have rendered the social component especially salient, introducing a possible boundary condition. These limitations notwithstanding, if some of the café's actions were unplanned but all of them were consistent with the founding purpose. Even after 100 years.

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