



**Aspect**

Transforming Society Through  
Social Science Innovation

# Social Business Model Innovation

**ASAP**

Aspect Student Accelerator Programme

**Pilot programme research and findings**

March 2021

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# An introduction



This Social Business Model Innovation report explores how startups with a social science and impact-driven foundation ideate and evolve their business models. Primary research is based on the first cohort of 19 startups from the cross-university Aspect Student Accelerator Programme (ASAP), as well as selected later-stage social entrepreneurs. The report is intended for university leaders who are developing programmes for commercialising social science-based businesses.

Social enterprise model theory is still in its infancy (Dentchev et. al., 2018; Wolfgang et. al. 2015) and there is limited research on the interplay between a theory of change and profit generation. Social-science based startups create unique combinations of activities not found in traditional business model approaches to sustain their mission and impact.

The ASPECT accelerator was the first of its kind to source early-stage social science-based ideas from across UK universities. Running this accelerator afforded unique insights into how social science rooted startups are commercialising at the earliest stages. Their long-run sustainability requires a differentiated and creative approach to business model development from the outset.

This report draws on primary data and interviews from the accelerator cohort as well as later stage social entrepreneurs and is complemented by wider reading on Theory of Change and current social business model development tools.

Three primary archetypes were used to segment businesses based on where they currently create competitive advantage in their business models:

1. Technology and Data.
2. Operational Model.
3. Customer and Product Innovation.

Economic growth  
accompanied by worsening  
social outcomes is not  
success.

**It is failure.**

**Jacinda Ardern**

Prime Minister of New Zealand

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# The Aspect Student Accelerator Programme



# ASAP Social Science Entrepreneurs

The Aspect Student Accelerator Programme (ASAP) focused on supporting early-stage social science entrepreneurship with a diverse commercialisation programme. Social science is, in its broadest sense, the study of society and the manner in which people behave and influence the world around us.

Social science entrepreneurship is the creation of ventures, services or products by:

- Founders with a background in the social sciences
- Multi-disciplinary teams with businesses models
- Processes that are rooted in social sciences

To that end, the first and second stage of the selection criteria for the final cohort of 19 businesses to enter the accelerator were designed to evaluate founder and business alignment with the programme thesis.

## Stage 1: Screening – focused alignment on the founders

ASAP focused on finding coachable founders with a relevant background and skillset to execute their desired projects. Relevant experience included either lived, employment or academic experience that contributed towards their motivation, passion and understanding of their problems and/or market.

Founders had to be impact-driven and align with at least two UN SDGs, either through the socially-responsible running of the business or the impact created through the business operations. They should have launched within the last two years and be pitch ready with less than a seed-round capital raise.

## Stage 2: Pitching – focused more on the businesses

Following initial screening, applicants were asked to pitch their businesses. Each startup was judged on its present business potential, but also the extent to which they could benefit from the program and community on the accelerator to advance their mission.

Business alignment with the Aspect mission (social impact, social sciences, SDGs) was a key criteria along with a view on progress in team and product development, traction/customer discovery and market evaluation.

A key component of the recruitment process was focused on diversity and inclusion. At each stage of the application process, we reviewed potential bias and applied processes to ensure accessibility for applicants, encouraging women, BAME, and disabled founders to apply by monitoring diversity at each stage of the selection process.

This work resulted in a truly varied cohort with founders and business representing stakeholders from all geographies, races and socio-economic levels. Multiple research studies have shown that such cognitive diversity also leads to improved business results.

There were five key industries of focus by which all cohort members were operating within or in tandem with outlined below.

Health

Equality

Education

Economy

Environment

# ASAP Commercialisation Overview

Social sciences research commercialisation comes with its own unique set of challenges. The pilot was therefore adapted to provide a bespoke and holistic curriculum for social entrepreneurs, starting from the assessment process through to post-programme coaching.

## Phase

# 1

- Selection criteria for social science entrepreneurs
- Emphasis on diversity and inclusion for the cohort and choice of delivery partners

### Phase 1 - August to September 2020 - Assessment & Selection

Pre-accelerator activities

Diversity and inclusion

Recruitment processes

Judging and selection

## Phase

# 2

- Socially responsible bootcamp kickoff to ensure startups understood concepts including data ethics, theory of change, and diversity and inclusion
- Selected social business modules, facilitators and speakers

### Phase 2 - October to January 2020 - Onboarding & Programme Delivery

Curriculum module delivery

Founder development

Mentorship and investment readiness

Programme operations

## Phase

# 3

- Primary research on startup impact, founder development and social business models development
- Coaching from a leading social entrepreneur

### Phase 3 - January 2021 onwards - Research & Post-Programme

Impact reporting

Outputs and reflective learning

Community development

Post-programme startup support

# ASAP Commercialisation

## Phase 2 Delivery

The accelerator curriculum was adapted to incorporate social business across the curriculum. Throughout core business modules such as brand strategy, facilitators tailored teachings for social entrepreneurs. Through mentorship, coaching and the wider community founders were exposed to social business models that worked in practice.

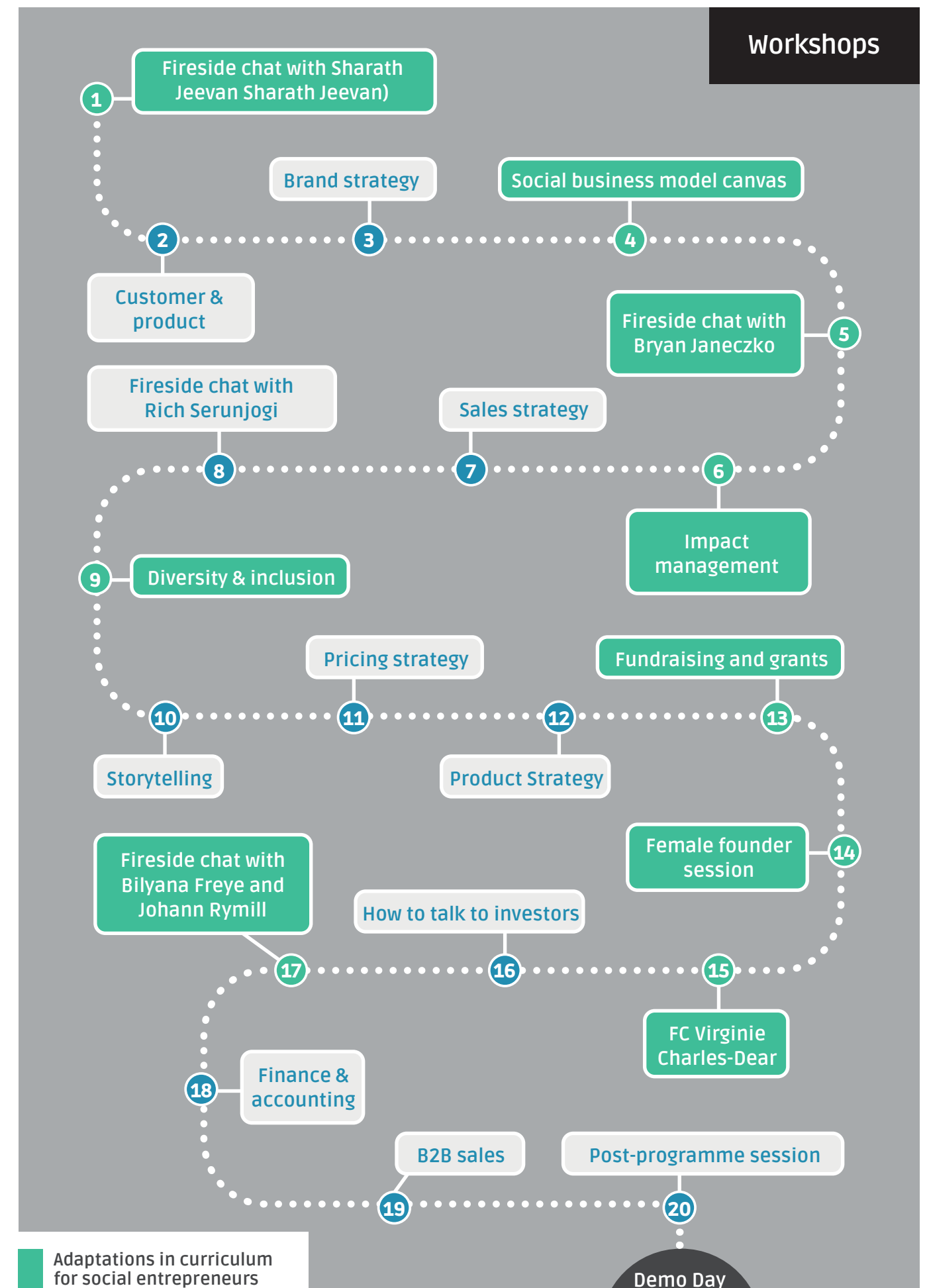
**16** bootcamps tailored to social sciences

**150** hours 1:1 founder support

**2** month mentorship programme

**12** founder peer roundtables

### DELIVERY PARTNERS



# 2

## Research Methodology and Approach





# Social Business Model Archetypes

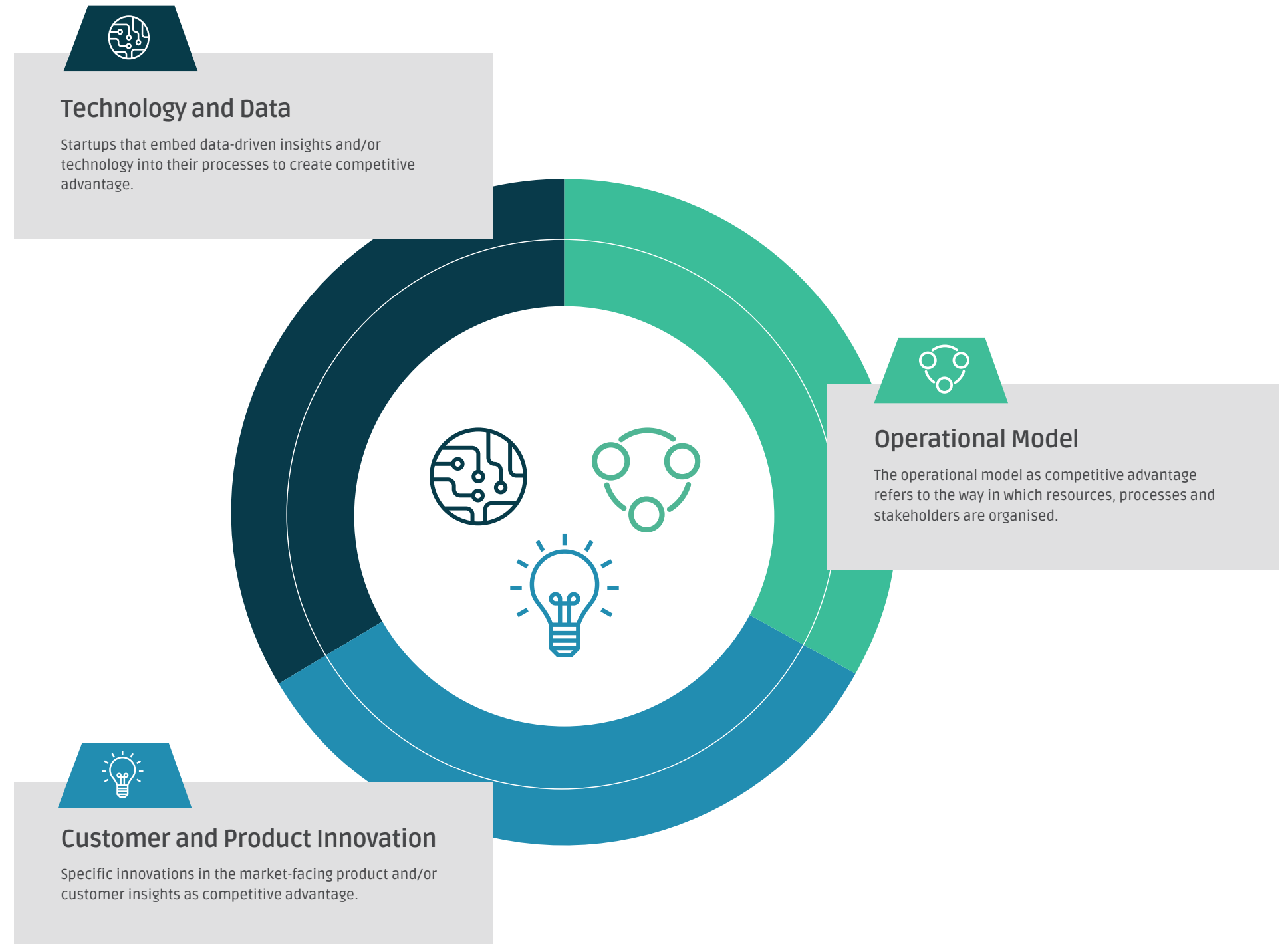
During our data collection, each company was asked to rank where they currently create competitive advantage in their business models:

## 1. Technology and Data

## 2. Operational Model

## 3. Customer and Product Innovation

Archetype categories were chosen based on observations of the businesses over the accelerator programme and their core strength areas. The categories are not mutually exclusive but rather, they allow a route to distilling and testing of preliminary findings that support future focused commercialisation interventions.



# Research methodology and approach

A sample set of seven accelerator cohort early-stage businesses were interviewed to understand their commercialisation journey targeting three main areas:

- The core influencing factors that led the founder towards starting a business and the legal structure chosen
- How the business model evolved to integrate and translate social science research or evidence
- Their key commercialisation challenges and opportunities

Later-stage social entrepreneurs were interviewed with a focus on which legal structure they chose and why, how they integrated social science research and impact into their businesses models, integration of business and impact metrics and how they overcame commercialisation challenges.

Each interview was conducted online and was between 30 and 60 minutes in duration.



## Early-Stage Social Science Commercialisation

- Data collection questionnaire sent to the cohort on their commercialisation journey and to help shortlist companies to interview
- Interviews with seven cohort founders to establish business model evolution

## Later-Stage Social Science Commercialisation

- Six interviews with later stage social entrepreneurs to understand how more mature business models evolve

## Learnings for future commercialisation framework

- Combining learnings to pinpoint areas where commercialisation can be accelerated at the early stages for social science entrepreneurs

# Interviews

## Understanding the Social Business Model Journey

The tables below show the companies interviewed and where applicable the associate case studies included in this report.

### Early-stage entrepreneurs

Company name	Business Stage	Company Structure	Customer & Product Innovation	Technology & Data	Operational Model	Interview	Case study page
LevelUp	Pre-Revenue	Private Ltd	✓			Co-Founders, Daniel Gordon Hall and Russell Indradjaja	N/A
I Speak Mental Health	Revenue	Private Ltd	✓			Co-Founders, Alejandro Serrano Saunders and Ana Isabel Bacallado Almandoz	P 23
neumind	Pre-Revenue	Private Ltd		✓		Co-Founders: Ellis Parry and Rufus Russell	P 17
SATIS Urinals	Pre-Revenue	Private Ltd		✓		Co-Founders, Hazel McShane and Amber Probyn	N/A
TxC	Revenue	NGO/ Simplified Shares Corp. (Col)			✓	Co-Founder and CEO, Sebastian Jaramillo	P 20
CAUKIN Studio	Revenue	Private Ltd			✓	Co-Founder, Harry Thorpe	N/A
YellowNest	Pre-Seed	Private Ltd			✓	Founder and CEO, Kannan Ganga	N/A

### Later-stage entrepreneurs

Company name	Business Stage	Company Structure	Customer & Product Innovation	Technology & Data	Operational Model	Interview	Case study page
Nunbelievable	Revenue	C-Corp	✓			Founder and CEO, Bryan Janezcko	P 22
toucanBox	Revenue	Private Ltd	✓			Founder and CEO, Virginie Charles-Dear	N/A
Moja	Pre-Revenue	C-Corp		✓		Founder and CEO, Tarig Hilal	P 16
Business Score	Post-Seed Revenue	Private Ltd		✓		Founder, Rich Serunjogi	N/A
MyMind	Revenue	Social Enterprise			✓	Founder Krystian Fikert	N/A
STiR Education	Revenue	Charity			✓	Founder, Sharath Jeevan	P 19



# 3

## Commercialisation Challenges and Opportunities





# Social Business Models Challenges & Opportunities

Prior to interviews, a short questionnaire was sent to the all cohort companies to understand both the challenges and opportunities of developing social business models aligned to their specific UN SDGs.

A mapping on UN SDGs as well as the most frequently cited challenges and opportunities are highlighted here.

## UN SDGs addressed by accelerator startups



**"Our impact focus means we will be able to better position ourselves to pitch to impact and sustainability-oriented investors and customers"**

*Suhrid Patel and Akbar Sher Khan – Impagro Farming Solutions*

## Challenges

- Effective go to market routes
- Balancing impact and short-term business results
- Establishing optimal pricing
- Measuring and communicating impact
- Navigating impacts of COVID

## Opportunities

- Recruiting high-quality mission-driven talent
- Growth in number of impact investors
- Ability to attract more diverse customers and stakeholders
- Pandemic re-focusing business narrative on UN SDGs
- Customer sentiment shifting towards purpose/impact

# 4

## **Social Business Model Innovation** Case Studies



Early- and later-stage social entrepreneurship case studies focused through:



Technology and Data

1



Operational Model

2



Customer and Product Innovation

3

# Social Business Model Innovation

## Technology and Data

### Data Analytics Research Engine

Of the cohort businesses surveyed – only 10% indicated technology and data as a primary area of competitive advantage. Interviews with both early- and late-stage entrepreneurs revealed that they had developed effective data driven methods to quickly integrate customer insights, secondary social science research into their business models that leverage channels and partners with complementary infrastructure and resources

#### Early-stage interviews key insights

- Prior exposure to **lean start up methodologies** supported more rigorous and effective customer discovery
- Competitive advantage gained from **being able to quickly filter** and aggregate disparate sources of research into the product/services
- Ability to access real-time data on customer testing and insights **allows founders to prioritise product/service iterations**
- Traction and credibility gained from **being able to provide feedback and data to customers and other stakeholders**

#### Later-stage interviews key insights

- Develop real-time and **quick data analytics** to aggregate and act on customer research and insights
- Customer insights **enabled service to a broader market** with a more scalable business model
- Hire **specialist data science** expertise in the team
- As data analytics becomes more sophisticated, develop **new data products** as revenue growth opportunities
- **Revenue and impact metrics** and measurement leveraging “quick data analytics” and communication of results to all stakeholders



# Case Study: Moja

## Financial inclusion

### Technology and Data

Startups that embed data-driven insights and/or technology into their processes to create competitive advantage.

Moja takes the pain out of pooling money, allowing family and friends to send, receive and pool money wherever they are in the world.



Tarig Hilal  
Founder & CEO

### About Moja

Year Started: **2018**  
Structure: **C-Corp**  
Stage: **Pre-Revenue**  
UN SDG: **Reduce inequalities**  
Customer: **Young entrepreneurial Africans**  
Target Outcome: **Enable family and friends to access finance**  
Impact Metrics:  
**Volume of transactions and number of users**

Moja originally had a goal to support refugees and financially displaced people on financial inclusion. At the early stages, they focused on development organisations to partner with but through rigorous customer research found a more efficient and scalable business model.

### Evolution through Customer Data

Moja initially started with a niche value proposition to impact the value chain of the humanitarian sector by targeting development support agencies. Following extensive customer research combined with key pieces of secondary research, the business model evolved to target the customer directly.

*“We initially targeted refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) and found through customer research their challenges were similar to the general working population. We evolved to target a much larger customer base that included refugees and IDPs” – Tarig Hilal*

### Competitive Advantage

Moja’s pooling financial lending app was developed directly from customer data and a few key pieces of secondary research. The ability to translate customer data and secondary research into viable business products was reinforced by a co-founding team with complementary skills in social sciences, business and technology. To augment Moja’s strengths in these areas. A future hire priority will be a data scientist to provide improved insights into customer behaviour on the mobile app.

### Integrating Business and Impact

In the short term, standard business metrics also capture impact metrics as the product inherently incorporates financial inclusion metrics. Longer term however, robust data analytics may be used to develop more inclusive, transparent and fairer credit scores to further the impact of Moja’s financial inclusion mission.

# Cohort Case Study: neumind

## Neurological support

### Technology and Data

Startups that embed data-driven insights and/or technology into their processes to create competitive advantage.

neumind is a contextual prompting smartphone app to help people with neurological conditions improve memory, executive functioning and independence.

neumind 

Ellis Parry  
Co-Founder

Rufus Russell  
Co-Founder

### About neumind

Year Started: **2018**  
Structure: **C-Corp**  
Stage: **Pre-Revenue**  
UN SDG: **Reduce inequality**  
Customer: **People with neurological conditions**  
Target Outcome: **Improve patient independence and functioning**  
Impact Metrics:  
**8,000 prompts have been sent to people suffering from serious neurological injuries and conditions using neumind's Alfred application.**

neumind connected personal experience, academic resources, gaps in existing products and key pieces of secondary research to develop their initial product. With a growing user base, quickly testing and iterating customer data became a core area of competitive advantage.

### Founder Commercialisation Journey

The founders started with a core problem from personal experience and followed the startup route primarily due to the expertise of the team, prior exposure to lean startup methodologies and the absence of robust digital tools on the market. Greater openness and a pro-entrepreneurial culture over the last five years at Oxford helped to promote startup creation.

### Business Model Evolution

neumind benefited from a research report evaluating the size of the brain injury rehabilitation market. After looking at existing products on the market, they realised most could be improved upon. Translating this evidence required filtering and prioritising the major problems the new business and digital product needed to address. With the founding team and advisor expertise, they were then able to validate each problem, hypothesize and test in an agile fashion to enable quick product development.

*“Our competitive advantage is that we can draw together ideas and information from various sources and move and test quickly through strong data analytics” – Ellis Parry & Rufus Russell*

### Key Early Stage Commercialisation Challenges

The credibility to speak to potential customers and investors relied on being able to quickly acquire and test customer data to gain traction. There were resource constraints in primary research but neumind is now working with a university to develop more primary research to accelerate new features and customer traction.

# Social Business Model Innovation

## Operating Models

### Effective scaling through Business and Impact

Of the 15 cohort businesses surveyed – 50% indicated that their businesses create a competitive advantage through their operational model. At both the early and late stages, this relies on rigorous customer testing combined with effective go-to-market strategies.

#### Early-stage interviews key insights

- Development of **symbiotic relationships between all business stakeholders** for disproportionate value gains
- Anticipated **growth in the use of technology to scale** but a strong configuration of the operational model around the problem came first
- Sourcing experts and **partners who complemented their unique proposition** and running experiments to find the optimal go to market

#### Later-stage interviews key insights

- Develop a business and operating model with minimum efficient scale by **utilising the most efficient go to market channels**
- Find **channels and partners with existing infrastructure, resources and relationships** to scale from the start and create impact faster
- Create a **dedicated function** in the operational model that combines research and delivery to improve processes and impact over time



# Case Study: STiR Education Equal Opportunity

## Operational Model

The operational model as competitive advantage refers to the way in which resources, processes and stakeholders are organised.

STiR Education re-ignites intrinsic motivation in teachers and education systems.



Sharath Jeevan  
Founder & CEO

## About STiR

Year Started: **2012**  
Structure: **NGO**  
Stage: **Revenue**  
UN SDG: **Quality Education**  
Customer: **Governments and schools**  
Target Outcome: **Lifelong learning for 10 million teachers and 300 million children**  
Impact Metrics:  
**The # of schools and children served through the programme**

STiR Education seeks to improve lifelong learning through education systems in Uganda and India. Several key elements of their operational model allowed STiR to reach 200,000 schools and 35,000 teachers.

## Evolution through Operational Model

STiR is a donor-based organisation primarily from private funding. The team initially targeted individual schools but quickly pivoted to target governments with existing budgets that wanted to improve schools. There is a myth that scale equals impact. STiR configured the organisation to minimum efficient scale after which growth and impact would compound disproportionately. The process involved “channel scaling”: picking the go-to-market route efficiently to reach as many schools as possible and working with partners that complemented STiR’s offering and removing duplicative efforts.

## Competitive Advantage

Through social science and impact STiR set up a programme design function to translate insights from primary evidence, academics, secondary research into actionable program design. In essence this function acted as that bridge between programme delivery and the external world . In STiR’s case, the speed and skillset of the people in this function acted as a catalyst to scaling impact and empowering local governments to improve education systems.

*“Social science approaches aren’t easily codified – they’re usually pretty messy. As there is no technical solution, the bet has to be on ongoing improvement in our case on the process and delivery.”* **Sharath Jeevan**

## Integrating Business and Impact Metrics

The team made a decision to secure private donations each year to cover the operational costs and harness government existing spending and infrastructure. This translated to a key efficiency gain metric - one dollar of spent at STiR leveraged \$30 of public spend.



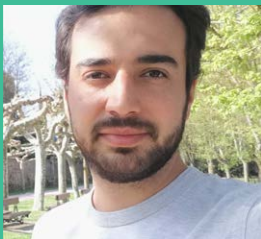
# Cohort Case Study: TxC

## Health and Wellbeing

### Operational Model

The operational model refers to the way in which resources, processes and stakeholders are organised.

TxC are working to reduce the poverty cycle caused by unwanted teenage pregnancy through delivering sexual and reproductive health Intervention at schools with the use of AI.



Sebastian Jaramillo  
Founder & CEO

### About TxC

Year Started: **2018**  
Structure: **Simplified Shares Corp**  
Stage: **Seed, Revenue**  
UN SDG: **Good health and wellbeing**  
Customer: **Schools, corporates and local municipalities**  
Target Outcome: **Decrease barriers for teenagers to access their sexual and reproductive rights**  
Impact Metrics: **192 teenagers trained on their sexual and reproductive rights in Colombia, with TxC's chatbot learning solution**

TxC founders connected their lived experience, market knowledge, academic research and technical skills to develop their programme, content and product offering. In addition to fostering key relationships with their customer base, local governments and corporates, they've created a functional ecosystem that's able to navigate the social taboo of reproductive health.

### Founder Commercialisation Journey

The founder had social entrepreneurship experience through a previous fin-tech venture, alongside this he possessed the necessary networks within the UN and local government institutions to drive his interventions forwards. The second part of his experience that greatly shaped his start-up journey was becoming a Chevening Scholar where he was able to conduct further research to bolster his certainty in the market and problem.

### Business Model Evolution

TxC leveraged secondary market research conducted by a variety of institutions on the market size and opportunity of high unwanted teenage pregnancies. After completing a thorough competitor review, Sebastian was able to identify an opportunity amongst sexual health teaching. Through the initial part of the programme the founders were able to build, test and iterate on their model, successfully monetizing their programmes and offering to local schools. For TxC, the next stage of the business is ensuring the product evolves to produce a repeatable and sustained impact on the business core metrics.

*"We were iterating on how best to drive value and mass adoption for our solutions to reduce the stigma around sex. We executed experiments and, in the end, when we saw cash flow and things were happening, we just followed the impact and followed the cash."* **Sebastian Jaramillo**

### Key Early Stage Commercialisation Challenges

One of the primary challenges was the clear application of western academic theory into the Latin market. There were great difficulties initially in understanding who stakeholders were and what their motivation was, then to subsequently align the most relevant narrative accordingly. Secondly, when balancing impact outcomes, it was also challenging to maintain a sustained cash flow from corporates and schools.

# Social Business Model Innovation

## Customer and product

### Purpose-Product-Market Fit

Of the 15 cohort businesses surveyed – 40% indicated customer and product innovation as their competitive advantage. For both early- and later-stage entrepreneurs, purpose was at the heart of the product, so creating a flywheel effect between the purpose, product and market with simple impact-driven customer messaging.

#### Early-stage interviews key insights

- Early product features driven by academics, customers, R&D and expert input
- Scope to improve product **through applied data and technology**, for example through impact measurement that translates to product improvements
- Impact is well-integrated into the core products so are not considered as “separate” entities to be balanced

#### Later-stage interviews key insights

- Keep the **purpose imperative core** in all customer messaging and utilise a **simple and easy-to-understand impact message**
- **Customer centricity and relentless focus on commercial sustainability** in the early stages enabled impact acceleration
- A purposeful and authentically communicated company mission affords second-order benefits throughout the business such as higher loyalty and lower attrition of talent

# Case Study: Nunbelievable Food Security

## Customer and Product Innovation

Specific innovations in the market-facing product and/or customer insights

Nunbelievable sells baked cookies and in turn donates meals to those most in need.



**nunbelievable**

**Bryan Janeczko**  
Founder & CEO

## About nunbelievable

Year Started: **2019**  
Structure: **C-Corp**  
Stage: **Revenue**  
UN SDG: **No Hunger**  
Customer: **Women that want to give back**  
Target Outcome: **Buy one give one – cookies sold and meals donated**  
Impact Metrics: **Meals Donated**

Nunbelievable started with the mission to alleviate food poverty in America and utilised the simple one for one impact model – for every box sold, a meal is donated to those in need. As the business evolved, Nunbelievable has leveraged select partners to scale its impact in line with revenue growth.

### Evolution through Customer and Product Innovation

Nunbelievable started with a vision to reduce food poverty and Its founder, a serial entrepreneur in the food sector and e-commerce worked to find a business model to fit this mission. To arrive at a viable business model that would create impact they tested 3 main hypotheses:

- Would people buy the product?
- Would they buy it online?
- Did the mission resonate with customers?

Customer centricity and product innovation combined with focus on scale from the outset allowed the company to meet its impact goals quickly (300,000 meals donated).

*“There are so many elements to test at the start of a business – keep the impact metric simple and focus on the revenue stream to gain momentum, as you grow leverage the right impact partners to strengthen your impact – you don’t have to build that from scratch in house.” **Bryan Janeczko***

### Competitive Advantage through Social Science and Impact

Nunbelievable’s mission drew in customers who deeply care about the mission, which also drove loyalty. The company was also able to attract and retain high quality talent through its purpose – millennials care more that their time has impact.

### Integrating Business and Impact Metrics

Nunbelievable’s key takeaway for early stage entrepreneurs is to keep impact metrics as simple as possible so it went through a tried and tested buy one give one business model. On the internal metrics, the company decided upfront to retain 10% of marketing spend on impact partners. This early decision created a halo effect for its key stakeholders creating a flywheel effect vs a tension between profit and purpose





# Cohort Case Study: I Speak Mental Health

## Health and Wellbeing

### Customer and Product Innovation

Specific innovations in the market-facing product and/or customer insights

**I Speak Mental Health (ISMH)** is working on teaching students and employees the language of mental health, so that they can help themselves while also helping others.



**Alejandro Serrano Saunders**  
Co- Founder

**Ana Isabel Bacallado Almandoz**  
Co- Founder

### About ISMH

Year Started: **2020**

Structure: **Private Limited**

Stage: **Pre-Seed, Revenue**

UN SDG: **Good health and wellbeing**

Customer: **University student in the UK**

Target Outcome: **Improve student and employee mental health and resilience through learning**

Impact Metrics: **Over 85 mental health kits distributed to university students in the UK**

The ISMH founders were motivated by friends encountering mental health problems during their time in higher education, combined with the natural intersection of the founders studies in business and psychology. They both realised that in their home country of Spain there was a serious social taboo of mental health and a lack of understanding of the problem scope.

### Founder Commercialisation Journey

After completing extensive research on launching a charity/non-profit the founders realised there were many bureaucratic barriers to entry to support relevant beneficiaries, so they decided to launch a private limited company. Both founders completed international university experience in Hong Kong and California. These journeys greatly shaped their founder experience and ambition, alongside pop-culture growth in the idea of entrepreneurship as an ideal early career choice.

### Business Model Evolution

ISMH leveraged academic theory in developing their initial product range, and had a focus on scientific backing in their R&D process. There needed to be adequate evidence of value before launching any component of their product. At this early stage there has been a great deal of attention to customer development which was key to build a robust product that can satisfy both B2B and B2C customer bases. After launching in late 2020 they realised the sales rates were lower than anticipated and decided to spend more time on understanding their metrics, in particular, focusing on customer mental health learning as they found this drove product engagement.

*"Entrepreneurial rhetoric is diametrically opposed in reality. You hear that 'entrepreneurs are brilliant', thinking about Musk or Zuckerberg's fantastic ideas and conviction in their work. What we've learned is that it is so far from the truth, what is most important is actually to have very little faith in your ideas, it helps you focus on the problem not your solution and asking the right questions."* **Alejandro Serrano Saunders & Ana Isabel Bacallado Almandoz**

### Key Early Stage Commercialisation Challenges

Remaining objective when analysing new data was identified as a key challenge of the commercialisation experience. The founders highlighted their struggle breaking away from a £5 price point for their product. Another challenge area was push back from investors in the lack of applied technology in the product, reducing the access to data insight and scalability of products. At its core, the fundamental challenge faced was attributing time and resource effectively to balance the commercial viability and impact of their activities.



# 5

## Conclusion and recommendations



# In conclusion

The preliminary findings from a sample set of early- and later-stage entrepreneurs revealed **two major areas to build upon**:

## 1. Founders' Learning and development prior to the accelerator

Early-stage founder commercialisation journeys were significantly influenced by how open their respective universities were to commercialising research projects. Encouragement or lack thereof by universities to develop research into business ideas influenced the founders' decision to starting a venture.

## 2. Prior entrepreneurial exposure

Similarly, prior entrepreneurial exposure through courses such as lean startup methodologies and theory of change allowed for noticeable acceleration in business model development.

Previous entrepreneurial experience and peer networks were also key influencing factors in founders deciding to convert their research into businesses.

However, when starting business there was little understanding or thought given to legal structures that would best fit their mission and outcomes, an experience also echoed by later-stage founders. Both merit further work to understand how best to help founders navigate legal structure specific to the problems they are tackling.

Secondly, through interviews and conversations with social entrepreneurs as well as wider reading on social business model concepts and tools, **three main areas of intervention** to accelerate early stage commercialisation emerged:

## 1. Find Purpose-Product-Market Fit

The term "Purpose-Product-Market-Fit" is used to capture the alignment of purpose to all aspects of the business model. Purpose answers an all-important question, "Why does a company exist?"—and the answer can serve as the beacon for all organisational decision-making.

Purpose-driven companies witness higher market share gains and grow three times faster on average than their competitors, all while achieving higher workforce and customer satisfaction. One of the top challenges cited by early-stage entrepreneurs was balancing impact and short-term business results. Interviews with later-stage social entrepreneurs revealed that tension need not exist if purpose is well-aligned and articulated across all sectors of the business.

Adoption of simple impact messaging, A/B testing customer responses and rethinking traditional line items such as marketing spend were three ways to help find purpose-product-market-fit.

Further research will enable more detailed analysis of other routes by which profit/purpose tensions can be converted to not only purpose-product-market-fit but also a flywheel that facilitates high-performance commercial and impact results.

## 2. Build a data-driven translation engine

There was a noticeable gap in the use of data and technology amongst the majority of founders. Those that did leverage data, in particular for customer discovery and insight, were able to iterate products faster.

At the later-stage, adoption of data-driven methods allowed for quicker and more effective assimilation of customer insights and secondary research to drive product and service improvements. In some cases, it also allows the development of new data products and revenue streams over time.

Given that social science research is often built around data analysis, it is essential to cultivate a data-driven mindset from the start. Ultimately, each startup must develop a method by which to translate research and data from various sources into viable commercial products and services.



## 3. Effective scaling for business and impact

Traditional go to market methods often have a narrow scope of customers and customer beneficiaries.

A social entrepreneur can think more broadly about its stakeholders and whether there's someone else who can pay or has complementary strengths for impact delivery.

For example, STiR Education realised that local governments had existing budgets to improve effectiveness of schools and worked with them instead of targeting schools directly. Nunbelievable did not conduct impact research in-house, they passed on their customer insights to research partners to help them create new high-impact interventions.

The core philosophy was to double down on inherent strengths of the founding team and business and to reach what one entrepreneur described as "minimum efficient scale" and then select partners to accelerate impact.

The minimum efficient scale approach defies the narrative that scale is equal to impact. By adoption of technology and data as well as effective scaling, startups can create disproportionate impact sooner.

# Social Business Model Archetypes Summary

For case study learnings, an initial distillation of interventions are illustrated below to both test in further primary and secondary research with a larger sample set but also detail and curate case studies, tools and methodologies on how each can be achieved to help founders create more effective social business models.

## Customer and Product Innovation

Specific innovations in the market facing product and/or customer insights as competitive advantage.

“Purpose Product Market Fit”

## Technology and Data

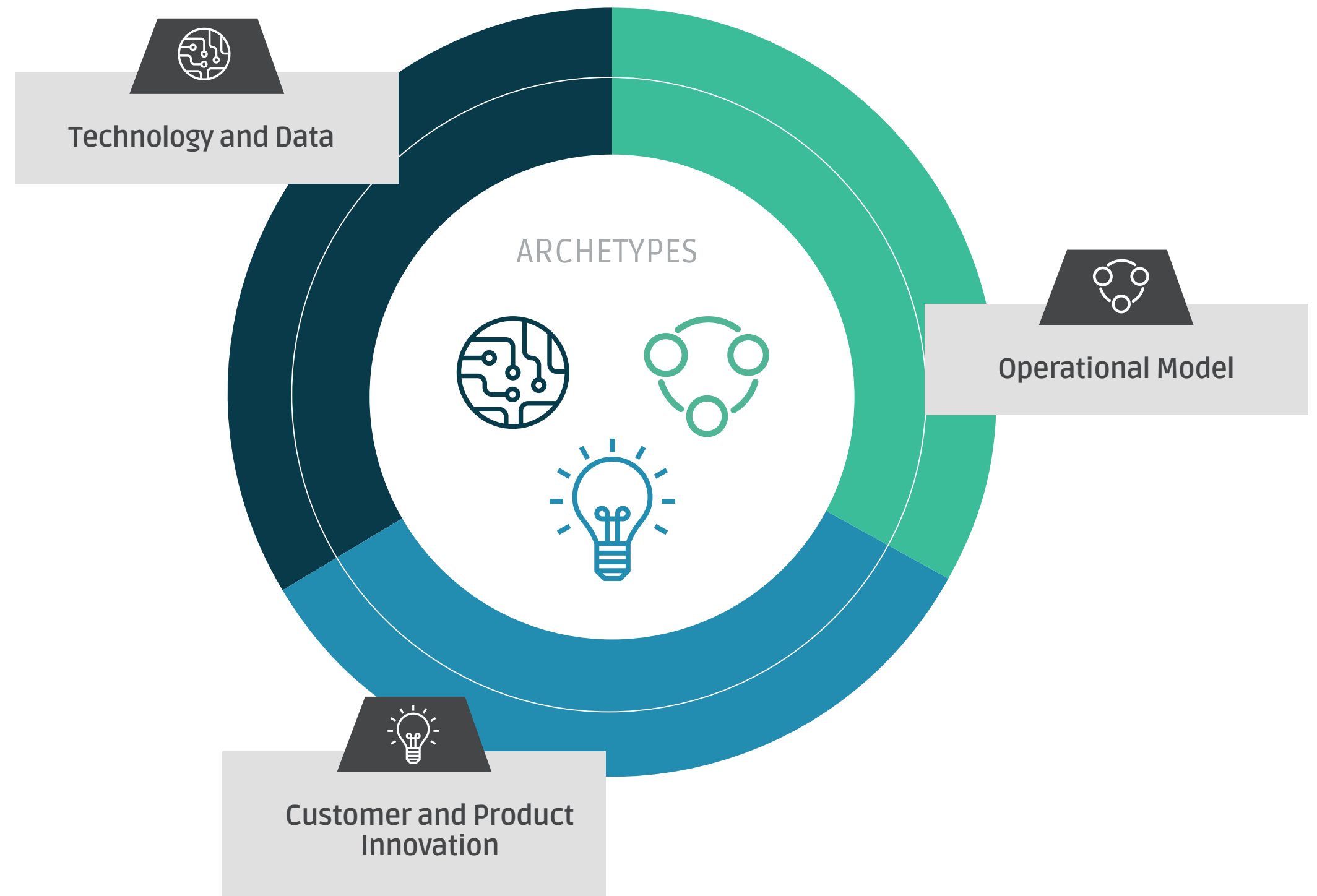
Startups that embed data-driven insights and/or technology into their processes to create competitive advantage.

“Data Driven Translation Engine”

## Operational Model

The operational model as competitive advantage refers to the way in which resources and stakeholders are aligned and incentivised.

“Effective Scaling for business and impact”



# Recommendations on Future Commercialisation Support

For each of the proposed interventions described, outlined below are immediate routes to adapt commercialisation support with a focus on accelerator curriculums.



1

## Finding a Purpose Product Market Fit

### Recommendations

- Match each social science startup with a research mentor to support purpose/mission alignment and measurement and communication of impact. It will also help to reinforce data-driven thinking and integration of business and impact metrics early on
- Support founders leading with purpose from day one and how this can be most effectively integrated through the business where relevant - through a combination of coaching, case-based learning and leveraging tools such as the social business model canvas



2

## Building a Data Driven Translation Engine

### Recommendations

- Infuse data-driven management and methods early in the accelerator curriculum in particular around rigorous customer discovery and testing
- Provide social science startups with relevant technology and data learning tools that will support them to build an efficient "translation engine" early on to incorporate social science and customer research



3

## Effectively Scaling for Business and Impact

### Recommendations

- Develop a case-based approach along with masterclasses from leading social entrepreneurs on efficient go-to-market strategies
- Deliver a module from legal experts and founders on how to find best fit legal structures for the specific business problems each venture is tackling



# Team & Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone that participated in our interview process:

- LevelUp
  - I Speak Mental Health
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  - TxC
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- Nunbelievable
  - toucanBox
  - Moja
  - Business Score
  - MyMind
  - STiR Education

## ASAP

### Delivery and Knowledge Team



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# References

### Social Enterprise Business Models

[https://westaway.co/insights/social-enterprise-business-models\\_\\_trashed/](https://westaway.co/insights/social-enterprise-business-models__trashed/)

### Social Business Model Canvas – Stanford Business School and Social Tech Trust

[https://sehub.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Social%20Business%20Model%20Canvas\\_1.pdf](https://sehub.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Social%20Business%20Model%20Canvas_1.pdf)

[https://socialtechtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Social-Tech-Trust-Canvas-Guidance-Paper\\_final.pdf](https://socialtechtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Social-Tech-Trust-Canvas-Guidance-Paper_final.pdf)

### Impact Practices and Learning

<https://www.inspiringimpact.org/>

### Theory of Change

<https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/ten-steps/Human>

### Human Centered Design

<https://www.designkit.org/>

### Social Entrepreneurs Book Recommendations

Disciplined Entrepreneurship by Bill Aulet  
Crossing the chasm by Geoffrey A Moore  
Paul Graham Essays

### Embracing the variety of sustainable business models

Social entrepreneurship, corporate intrapreneurship, creativity, innovation, and other approaches to sustainability challenges (Dentchev, Wolfgang)



Transforming Society Through  
Social Science Innovation

Aspect (A Social sciences Platform for Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Transformation) is a network for organisations looking to make the most of commercial and business opportunities from social sciences research.

Supported by Research England's Connecting Capability Fund, Aspect members sit at the epicentre of discovery, imagination and progress in the social sciences. We draw together pioneering academics with innovative industry leaders to tackle the most complex societal challenges of our time.

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