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Curating 1000 flowers as they bloom: Leveraging pluralistic initiatives to diffuse social innovations

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Abstract

Research Summary: Social and environmental challenges in our society offer opportunities for innovation. Having a strong mission can enhance both opportunity recognition and strategic alignment; however, aligning strategy and mission can be challenging when an organization pursues its social mission in pluralistic ways. How can mission-driven organizations manage pluralistic local initiatives while cohering to their missions? Using an inductive field study, I trace how Slow Money, an organization fostering sustainable local food systems by connecting food entrepreneurs with local investors, translated its core mission into different mission-oriented local initiatives. I find that mission-oriented local initiatives were recombined to create novel strategies curated and diffused by the central leadership, and I show how, rather than derail an organization's mission, pluralistic local initiatives can foster strategies for social innovation.

Managerial Summary: Organizations addressing social and environmental challenges often are mission driven. Though a mission can help guide strategy decisions, it also can lead to strategy confusion, especially when an organization consists of many local groups

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with different interpretations of the mission. I use the case of Slow Money, a nonprofit supporting sustainable local food systems, to understand how an organization can transform an assortment of mission-based strategies into an asset rather than a liability. I find that by promoting an open exchange of local initiatives and strategies, Slow Money's central leadership validated strategy diversity. It also provided its local groups with the opportunity to borrow and repurpose other groups' initiatives. In this way, diverse local strategies created mission unity while also increasing organizational social innovation.

KEYWORDS

mission alignment, purpose, social innovation, strategy formation, strategy process

1 | INTRODUCTION

Social and environmental challenges in our society—such as poverty, hunger, climate change, natural resource depletion, fair access to banking, healthcare crises, and many more—offer opportunities to innovate. However, addressing these challenges often requires systemic change across multiple products, industries, and locales (Henderson, 2021). For instance, investment in small farms and food businesses is critical to support increased food demand in a growing population¹ and make food production more resilient to the effects of climate change. Directing more capital to farming is essential to advance technologies that improve agricultural production and market transactions; help develop infrastructures for transportation and logistics; and attract entrepreneurs, innovators, and workers. Yet, traditional financial institutions have trouble addressing agricultural risks and high transaction costs, possess little expertise in managing agricultural loans, and lack lending policies that foster the inclusion of young farmers and minorities (The World Bank Group, 2020).

Reforming the financial industry to support change in the food and agriculture sector is just one challenge of many that requires social innovation strategies. Strategy scholars studying how to increase innovation capabilities have suggested that a clear purpose or mission² can enhance opportunity recognition and strategic alignment across an organization (Besharov & Mitzinneck, 2023; Henderson, 2020; Tushman & O'Reilly, 2002). Purpose can serve “as a

¹According to the World Bank (2021), worldwide demand for food will increase by 70% by 2050, requiring a minimum of \$80 billion in annual agricultural investments.

²While mission and purpose often are used as synonyms, some scholars (e.g., Rindova & Martins, 2023) warn against conflating the two terms. In this article, I view organizational mission as an “articulation of organizational purpose” (Lucas & Park, 2023, p. 3). At the same time, I contend that a strong organizational mission is more than “a speech-act” summarized in a statement (Rindova & Martins, 2023, p. 179). When properly articulated and enacted, organizational mission contributes to the formation of a sense of purpose (e.g., Beer et al., 2022; Kouamé et al., 2022).

foundation for framing clear, cogent strategies to drive business growth” (Gulati, 2022, p. 56) and “to seek out opportunities in unforeseen spaces” (Gulati, 2022, p. 58).

A shared sense of purpose is facilitated by a clearly articulated mission (e.g., Beer et al., 2022; Kouamé et al., 2022), since the function of an organization's mission is to ensure that “the strategy of the firm is widely understood, and that the firm's structure and processes are designed to support it” (Henderson, 2021, p. 3). However, the process by which an organizational mission promotes coordination among individuals in different contexts to develop novel, mission-aligned strategies remains underexplored.

Strategy-making scholars (e.g., Burgelman, 1983; Burgelman, 1991; Mintzberg, 1978; Noda & Bower, 1996) have found that the autonomous initiative of local managers can play a critical role in the formation of strategies at large and complex organizations. When confronting new challenges, leaders may opt to set intentions and broad goals while leaving room for innovation and creativity by local actors who have a better understanding of their environments (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). However, bottom-up initiatives can increase variation in local strategies. Maintaining the coherence of a firm's strategy may be particularly challenging when a mission inspires local initiatives that represent “locally optimal solutions” (Rindova & Martins, 2023, p. 178). In other words, coordinating multiple emergent strategies is tough (Chen et al., 2019).

Leveraging a longitudinal, inductive field study, I examined how local leaders in a multisite organization translated their mission into local initiatives, and how mission-oriented local initiatives³ were recombined to create strategies that then were curated and diffused by the central leadership. I used the case of Slow Money to understand how a highly decentralized nonprofit dedicated to supporting sustainable local food systems managed the growth of pluralistic, mission-oriented local initiatives by aggregating them up into higher-level strategies that then fed back to the mission. Developing strategies for social innovation is paramount to organizations with strong social missions, which makes Slow Money a perfect setting to study the role of mission as both a driver of social innovation and a coordinating mechanism. An emphasis on microlevel interactions allowed for a fine-grained explanation of how heterogeneity emerges and is reconciled in a multisite organization.

My analysis revealed that devising strategies for social innovation involved the interplay of the central and local leadership. The central leadership was responsible for articulating the organizational purpose in a formal mission. Local leaders crafted mission-oriented local initiatives based on their understanding of local resources and needs and then bundled local initiatives into strategies that reflected local interpretations of the mission. In turn, the central leadership legitimized these emergent strategies (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) and curated a repertoire of strategies for social innovation. The national organization distributed a formal strategy tool kit among existing and prospective local leaders through strategizing episodes (Hendry & Seidl, 2003), such as leader retreats and masterclasses. The tool kit gave existing and prospective leaders an opportunity to borrow and recombine initiatives while consolidating their own local strategies. Because the national leadership celebrated the diversity of local strategies, local leaders accepted pluralistic strategies as part of the mission. Yet, alignment between local strategies and the organizational mission did not originate from clearly laid out

³Following Webster's New World College Dictionary, I define *mission-oriented local initiatives* as new ideas or methods originating from local actors' interpretation of an organization's mission and their desire to accomplish it. Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition (2004) defines an initiative as “the characteristic of originating new ideas or methods.”



plans, but from interactions at the local and national levels that triggered multiple layers of interpretation of Slow Money's mission.

This study adds to the literature on strategy formation and social innovation by showing how organizations can use their missions to foster social innovation and strategic alignment between the central organization and its local units.

2 | THE ROLE OF MISSION IN STRATEGY FORMATION

With issues such as socioeconomic inequality and environmental crises becoming more and more salient to businesses, strategy scholars have started to address how purpose influences both organizational and societal outcomes (Zenger, 2023). Some scholars (e.g., Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1994; Gulati, 2022; Ocasio et al., 2023) have argued that purpose precedes strategy and is the origin of organizational meaning and action. For instance, Ocasio et al. (2023, p. 124) defined purpose as “institutionalized ideals, value-based aspirations guiding strategy and action.” Others have suggested that purpose guides strategy by reducing corporate myopia, helping executives “see issues that they may otherwise miss, have holistic perspectives on issues, [and] sustain their focus on the most important signals” (Lee et al., 2023, p. 307).

In many cases, an organization's purpose is encapsulated in its mission, which acts “as a cognitive bridge between its identity and its actions” (Grimes et al., 2019, p. 819). Because the mission statement incorporates the values of a firm's founders, it thus influences the choice of a firm's business model and the design of its structure and processes (Hollensbe et al., 2014; Perkmann & Spicer, 2014). Hart (1992, p. 337) explicitly linked mission and strategy formulation: Following Hamel and Prahalad (1989), he defined mission as “an articulation of strategic intent” that triggers specific goals and motivates organizational members. The mission statement also is used to frame and disseminate purpose internally (George et al., 2021).

A company's mission, which “distinguishes a business from other firms of its type and identifies the scope of its operations in product and market terms,” can increase the sense of purpose among managers and employees (Pearce II, 1982, p. 15). For instance, a qualitative, inductive study of two social enterprises in the United Kingdom found that tracking employees' contributions to the mission helped employees perceive their work as more meaningful (Beer et al., 2022). Recent work has revealed that a strong mission and sense of purpose positively impact corporate performance and other organizational outcomes. Analyzing employee responses across 429 firms in a variety of industries, Gartenberg et al. (2019) found that financial performance is better when mid-level employees have a strong sense of purpose—defined as “a concrete goal or objective for the firm that reaches beyond profit maximization” (Henderson & Van den Steen, 2015, p. 327)—and clear directions from their managers. A clear mission also may enhance innovation capabilities by increasing a firm's strategic alignment and collaboration with external stakeholders (Gulati, 2022; Henderson, 2021).

The examples above suggest that a mission can serve two functions: inspire employees and increase their commitment to the existing organizational strategy, and foster innovation by giving managers and employees a path to experiment with new initiatives that pursue organizational goals. Burgelman (1983) captured these different approaches to strategy-making when he distinguished between a firm's induced strategic behaviors and autonomous strategic behaviors. The former stem from the existing strategic planning of a firm, that is, the incentives and control systems that the top management devises at the central level. The latter originate from the

initiative of mid-level managers who identify and pursue new strategic opportunities at the local level, thus expanding the firm's scope.

The literature on mission and purpose suggests that coordinating these central and local behaviors helps yield coherent organizational strategies, and this coordination is easier when local initiatives are aligned with an organization's mission. In practice, this means that not only does a mission need to resonate with individuals who have different backgrounds and local priorities, but mid-level managers must find ways to weave their local initiatives into the firm's strategy. As important as this process is, it remains unclear how mission-driven organizations can manage the growth of pluralistic local initiatives that adhere to their missions.

Work on the microfoundations of strategy has drawn attention to the role that individual cognition plays in the formation of firm-level strategy (e.g., Helfat & Peteraf, 2015; Laamanen & Wallin, 2009). Managerial and organizational values, typically embedded in the mission, are one type of cognitive resource that contributes to strategy emergence (Farjoun, 2002). Rindova and Martins (2018, 2023) have argued that managers' values affect strategy formation because they inspire innovative solutions to novel problems and facilitate the integration of societal concerns. Following Schwartz (1992), Perkmann and Spicer (2014, p. 1787) defined organizational values as "the belief system around the ultimate goals of the organization and how these should be achieved." In their study of the formation of Indymedia London, a grassroots media collective, they showed how organizational values affect organizational structure by restricting the range of acceptable organizational forms.

These studies show that the values embedded in a mission matter to strategy formation, but they do not address how a multisite organization can use its mission to develop strategies that harness local variation while maintaining mission integrity. This is surprising for at least two reasons. The first issue is mission drift—the discontinuity between an organization's perceived objectives and its actions (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Grimes et al., 2019). Mission drift is an "an emerging strategic challenge" for all types of organizations, not just for social enterprises (Grimes et al., 2019, p. 820). Second, strategy scholars have a longstanding interest in understanding how the relationship between corporate headquarters and business units influences strategic adaptation at the local level (e.g., Ghoshal & Nohria, 1989; Gupta, 1987; Joseph & Ocasio, 2012).

The literature has examined how leaders of multisite organizations can promote local initiatives (Burgelman, 1983, 1991; Noda & Bower, 1996) by using their missions as guiding principles and leaving ample discretion to local actors. For instance, NASA's mission of putting a man on the moon in the 1960s inspired thousands of specialists to devise strategies to solve various technical issues (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). This process is consistent with Burgelman et al.'s (2018) view of strategy formation, in which realized strategy originates from a combination of deliberate and emergent strategies (Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985). What remains unexplained is how local actors stay close to their organizational mission while addressing local constraints, and how central leaders manage pluralistic initiatives to accomplish complex goals, such as social innovation.

My ethnography of Slow Money fills this gap by studying how the interplay of strategizing episodes (Hendry & Seidl, 2003) at the national level and emergent strategies (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) at the local level led to social innovation strategies that cohered with the organizational mission. To better understand how mission contributes to the formation of social innovation strategies, I adopted a bottom-up, cognitive perspective on strategy formation. In line with this approach, I analyzed interactions within Slow Money's local groups and between the local groups and the national organization to understand agency "less as action and more as



the act of interpretation” (Suddaby et al., 2010). I paid close attention to the processes by which the local and central actors aggregated mission-oriented local initiatives into strategies, and how those strategies fed back to the organizational mission.

3 | RESEARCH METHODS

Slow Money presented an ideal setting to examine how diverse local initiatives unified by an organizational mission can foster social innovation strategies. As a nascent organization with growth based on local groups in multiple locations, Slow Money offered the opportunity for comparative within-case and across-case analyses (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). As a volunteer-based organization with limited resources to promote collaboration among different constituencies (e.g., sustainable farming and food businesses, accredited and unaccredited investors, investment professionals, foodies, foundations, and other nonprofits), it also provided the chance to study how national leaders encouraged the formation of “deliberately emergent” strategies (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) in the form of local initiatives tied together by an overarching mission.

3.1 | Research setting

The nonprofit Slow Money was founded in 2009 by Woody Tasch, a former angel investor and author of the 2008 book *Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money: Investing as if Food, Farms and Fertility Mattered*. Its stated mission was, “to build local and national networks, and develop new financial products and services, dedicated to investing in small food enterprises and local food systems; connecting investors to their local economies; and, building the nurture capital industry” (Slow Money, 2010a). In overt opposition to “an economy based on extraction and consumption” (Slow Money, 2010b), the “nurture capital industry” was grounded in principles such as soil fertility; sense of place; care of the commons; and cultural, ecological, and economic diversity.

After a successful US book tour, Woody shared Slow Money’s principles and mission at the inaugural 2009 national gathering in Santa Fe, New Mexico:

People were inviting me to come into their communities and to talk about their ideas on how they would do it. They became institutes of, “How can we do Slow Money in our community?” We had a bunch of those meetings around the country, and then I realized we needed to do one meeting centralized and invite everyone from all the communities to come, mostly because I was hearing the same thing everywhere I went: “God, this is amazing. Instead of having all these little, isolated conversations, let’s try to bring everyone together and see what happens.” (Woody Tasch, personal interview with the author)

This first national gathering sparked enthusiasm for Slow Money’s mission and triggered geographical expansion. As Tim, one of the early members of Slow Money, recalled in a formal interview, “You had, I guess, 435 or so people from 36 states and six countries show up off an idea. It was a gathering out of a book.” Several individuals who were in Santa Fe or had otherwise been enthused by Slow Money’s mission started local groups to implement Slow Money’s

ideas on the ground. The groups were formed and run by volunteers who served as local leaders. Slow Money is ideologically, albeit not formally, connected with Slow Food, a movement born in 1989 in Italy with the intention of protecting biodiversity and excellence in food (van Bommel & Spicer, 2011). Like Slow Food, Slow Money groups bring together foodies, farmers, and food producers. However, by combining the food and financial spheres, Slow Money also attracts investors, land trusts, foundations, and other nonprofits. As of June 2022, Slow Money had facilitated more than \$79 million in investments into 806 small farms and food enterprises across the United States and grown to 25 local groups in the United States, with an international presence in Australia, Canada, and France (Slow Money Institute, 2022).

3.2 | Sample design and data collection

In accordance with the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), data were collected using a combination of archives, observations, and semi-structured interviews. Fieldwork encompassed a total of 11 US-based Slow Money groups (Table 1): five from the East Coast (New York, Boston, Maine, North Carolina, and Vermont), four from the West Coast (Northern California, Southern California, San Luis Obispo [SLO], and Northwest), and two from the Midwest (Northeast Kansas and Ohio). To account for variation among groups, combinations of rural versus urban research sites and “old” versus “new” groups were chosen.⁴

Most of the ethnographic work was conducted between Spring 2014 and Spring 2016, with follow-ups through Fall 2019. Data collection included more than 50 days in the field and continued until theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). From April 2014 to October 2019, I attended 29 local and regional gatherings in New York City (NYC), Boston, Maine, North Carolina (NC), Northern California (Northern Cal), and Vermont. Meetings lasted from 2 h to multiple days and featured a variety of topics relevant to local food and finance, including: Slow Money's mission and success stories, investment opportunities, and traditional and nontraditional financing vehicles (e.g., equity vs. debt, grant programs, and crowdfunding). Local entrepreneurs regularly featured their businesses during showcases or pitch competitions. I also attended national gatherings in November 2014 (Louisville, KY) and October 2017 (Boulder, CO). My fieldnotes recorded my observations of Slow Money's local, regional, and national meetings, including the varied interpretations of Slow Money's mission and the mission-oriented local initiatives publicized during live events; how local actors interacted with one another and with local leaders; and how local actors and local leaders interacted with the national leadership.

To complement my field observations, I conducted 53 semi-structured formal interviews with Slow Money local leaders, investors, and entrepreneurs between March 2015 and June 2016. The interviews generally lasted 60–90 min and were designed to gain a deeper understanding of Slow Money's goals and the functioning of the local groups. They offered an opportunity to clarify the rationales behind the different mission-oriented local initiatives I observed in the field; to examine the local groups' interpretations of Slow Money's mission; and to better understand the role of the central organization in evaluating, coordinating, and diffusing local strategies. I asked the local leaders about the decisions they had made and the initiatives they undertook to form and run their local groups, including details about their group's operations and compositions, partnerships and collaborations, challenges encountered, surprises, turning

⁴“Old” groups are those founded in 2010, as indicated by early Slow Money leaders.



TABLE 1 Fieldwork.

Local group name	State	Year founded	Rural vs. urban	Number of meetings observed (2014–2019)	Number of formal interviews conducted (2015–2016)
Slow Money National	-	2009	-	2	3 (Slow Money founder, VP, board member)
Slow Money Boston	MA	2010	URBAN	8	7 (4 local leaders, 2 investors, 1 entrepreneur)
Slow Money Maine	ME	2010	RURAL	2	7 (1 local leader, 2 investors, 4 entrepreneurs)
Slow Money NYC	NY	2010	URBAN	13	10 (2 local leaders, 3 local leaders/investors, 5 entrepreneurs)
Slow Money North Carolina	NC	2010	RURAL	2	8 (2 local leaders, 2 investors, 4 entrepreneurs)
Slow Money Northwest	OR/WA	2010	URBAN	-	1 (local leader)
Slow Money Northern California	CA	2011	URBAN	1	5 (1 local leader, 2 investors, 2 entrepreneurs)
Local Loans for Local Foods (Cincinnati)	OH	2011	URBAN	-	1 (local leader/investor)
Slow Money San Luis Obispo	CA	2012	RURAL	-	1 (local leader/investor)
Slow Money Southern California	CA	2012	URBAN	-	6 (3 local leaders, 1 investor, 2 entrepreneurs)
Slow Money Vermont	VT	2014	RURAL	1	3 (local leaders)
Slow Money Northeast Kansas	KS	2014	RURAL	-	1 (local leader)
TOTAL				29	53

Note: Local groups are ordered by the year in which they were founded.

points, and learning moments. With the investors, I discussed their reasons for financing local food businesses, their perceptions of Slow Money's mission, the characteristics they valued in an entrepreneur, and examples of interactions with Slow Money entrepreneurs and local or national leaders. From the entrepreneurs, I gathered information about their business goals, how they felt their businesses aligned with Slow Money's mission, challenges they faced, and benefits accrued from their connections to Slow Money.

I used archival data to triangulate the evidence that emerged from these observations and interviews. For instance, when multiple informants indicated that Slow Money National had organized conference calls, webinars, and a masterclass to share mission-oriented local initiatives and local strategies among local leaders, I checked archival records to validate these

accounts. I also searched for archival documents (e.g., Slow Money internal publications, media articles, and interviews) that documented past local initiatives at the time they were implemented. I used this information to develop robust interpretations of the features and rationales of such initiatives.

3.3 | Data analysis

I coded the fieldnotes and interviews according to the principles of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), using the software ATLAS.ti. Following an iterative process, I engaged in open coding and memo writing. Using line-by-line coding, I generated first-order codes inductively from interviews and fieldnotes (Charmaz, 2006). I coded features of each initiative that the local groups implemented to pursue the Slow Money mission, including whether the initiatives were retained or dropped. In parallel, I coded the local leaders' understanding of the resources at their disposal to develop sustainable local food systems, and their interpretations of how local initiatives fulfilled both the organizational mission and their needs.

Specific bundles of mission-oriented initiatives emerged in each location, which I coded as dominant for that location (Table 2). Of the local groups I analyzed, Boston and SoCal prioritized two initiatives: "igniting the local community" and "promoting pooled investing"; NC, NYC, Northern Cal, SLO, and Northeast (NE) Kansas drew on two different initiatives: "facilitating peer-to-peer investing" and "highlighting nonfinancial resources"; finally, Maine, the Northwest, and Vermont took advantage of a vibrant ecosystem of individuals and organizations committed to advancing their local food systems to pursue two further initiatives: "convening diverse actors with shared interests" and "orchestrating and complementing resources" already in place.

The different bundles of mission-oriented local initiatives generated three local strategies that were pioneered by certain groups formed in 2010 and subsequently embraced by other groups (Table 2). Specifically, the initiatives "igniting the local community" and "promoting pooled investing" helped with the local strategy of *demoing the mission to attract initial support*. This strategy was pioneered by Slow Money Boston and diffused to Slow Money SoCal. The initiatives "facilitating peer-to-peer investing" and "highlighting nonfinancial resources" assisted in *fostering relationships with actors key to the mission*. Slow Money NC and Slow Money NYC pioneered this strategy, which then was adopted by Slow Money Northern Cal, SLO, and NE Kansas. Finally, the initiatives "convening diverse actors with shared interests" and "orchestrating and complementing resources" allowed for *amplifying the ecosystem to scale the mission*. This strategy first emerged at Slow Money Maine, but also diffused to Slow Money Northwest and Slow Money Vermont.

To better understand how an organizational mission can help generate and coordinate pluralistic social innovation strategies, I focused on interactions between the local and central actors and the cyclic interplay between Slow Money's local and national strategies. Local leaders crafted initiatives designed to harness local resources and then bundled them into strategies that reflected their interpretations of the national mission. Thus, I coded the local leaders' rationales of diverse local strategies vis-à-vis the organizational mission and their experimentation with replicating or augmenting existing strategies by mixing and matching initiatives.

The national organization sustained this process by celebrating the diversity of local approaches and developing knowledge-sharing tools to curate social innovation strategies that aligned with the organizational mission. I therefore coded the national leaders' efforts to

TABLE 2 Mission-oriented local initiatives and local strategy variation (2010–2016).

Mission-oriented local initiatives								
Local group name	Igniting the local community	Promoting pooled investing	Facilitating peer-to-peer investing	Highlighting nonfinancial resources	Convening diverse actors with shared interests	Orchestrating and complementing resources	Local strategies (dominant bundles of initiatives)	
Slow Money Boston	D	D	X				DEMOING THE MISSION TO ATTRACT INITIAL SUPPORT	
Slow Money SoCal	D	D	X					
Slow Money NC	X		D	D			FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS WITH ACTORS KEY TO THE MISSION	
Slow Money NYC	X	X	D	D				
Slow Money Northern Cal	X		D	D				
Slow Money SLO		X	D	D				
Slow Money NE Kansas	X		D	D	X	X		
Slow Money Maine	X	X	X	X	D	D	AMPLIFYING THE ECOSYSTEM TO SCALE THE MISSION	
Slow Money Northwest			X	X	D	D		
Slow Money Vermont	X	X	X		D	D		

Note: D = Dominant initiatives in a local group, defined as the initiatives that were prioritized by the group. Pioneer local groups are in bold.

oversee and coordinate the local groups, legitimize local strategies at national gatherings, and promote the sharing of those strategies with curated strategy tool kits and the help of pioneer local leaders.

I used these first-level codes to generate conceptual categories and higher-level aggregate dimensions that corresponded to the key mechanisms of strategy formation and diffusion. In the analytical memos, I linked these empirical themes to the existing literature on strategy formation. For instance, my analysis revealed that strategic alignment did not originate from clear top-down plans, but from interactions at the local and national levels and multiple layers of interpretation of Slow Money's mission. Devising and coordinating strategies for social innovation in this multisite organization involved both the emergence of local initiatives (Burgelman, 1983, 1991; Noda & Bower, 1996) bundled into strategies (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) at the local level and strategizing episodes (Hendry & Seidl, 2003) at the central level. The latter were critical to reconcile local strategies with the organizational mission and to then diffuse them in ways that simultaneously celebrated variation and supported mission alignment.

Figure 1 offers a schematic view of my data structure.

4 | STRATEGY FORMATION AND DIFFUSION AT SLOW MONEY

Three mechanisms of strategy formation and diffusion emerged from the data. The first one, *crafting mission-oriented local initiatives*, traces how local groups connected the mission to their local contexts and devised strategic initiatives to pursue the mission locally. The second one, *forming local strategies for social innovation*, accounts for how local actors reconciled local initiatives with the organizational mission and recombined bundles of mission-oriented local initiatives into stable configurations. The final mechanism, *curating strategies for social*

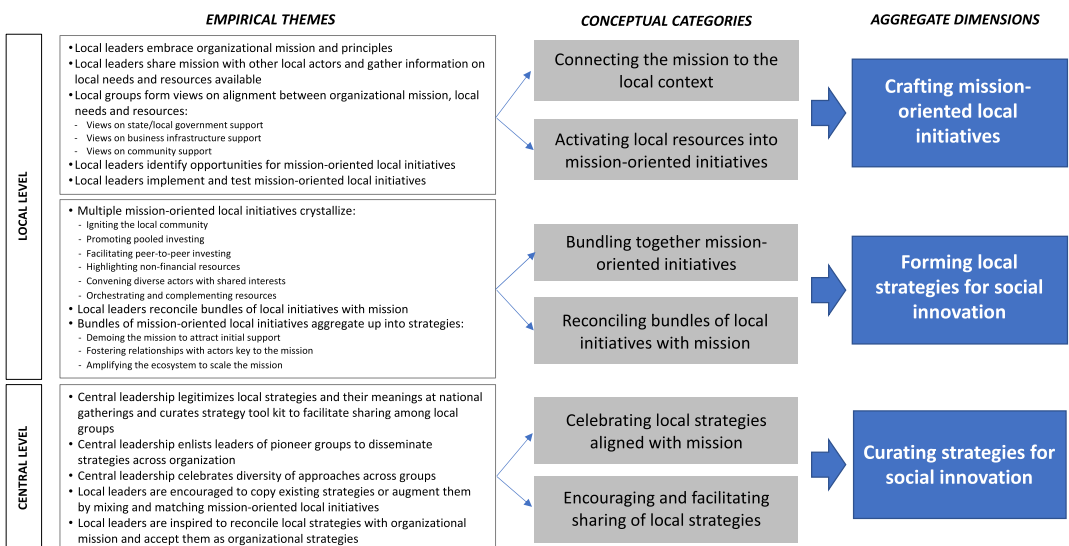


FIGURE 1 Data structure: Emergence and diffusion of Slow Money strategies (2009–2016).



innovation, shows how the central leadership coordinated the local groups' pluralistic initiatives by celebrating diversity within the Slow Money brand and facilitating the sharing of local strategies.

4.1 | Crafting mission-oriented local initiatives

The first mechanism of strategy formation and diffusion at Slow Money consisted of *crafting mission-oriented local initiatives*. In this phase, leaders of the pioneer local groups, who had familiarized themselves with the organizational mission and principles, attempted to “do Slow Money” in their local contexts. Pioneer local leaders surveyed local investors, entrepreneurs, and social activists to understand the entrepreneurs' needs and the type of support that the government, business infrastructure, and community offered to their local food systems. Based on their understanding of the local context, they identified opportunities to implement Slow Money's mission, experimenting with different types of strategic initiatives. For instance, Slow Money Boston strove to generate interest in investing in local food businesses. Its strategic initiatives included community events to disseminate Slow Money's mission and attract entrepreneurs and investors. Slow Money NC and Slow Money NYC were quicker to form an entrepreneur and investor base by scouting local farmers' markets and tapping into their social networks. While they still held community meetings, their initiatives were geared toward forging ties between entrepreneurs and investors and preparing entrepreneurs to make the most out of these encounters. The more ambitious Slow Money Maine sought to convene multiple actors and combine multiple types of local resources to pursue large-scale projects. Its initiatives brought together individual investors, local agencies, and foundations to widen and deepen the entrepreneurs' resource pool.

While *crafting mission-oriented local initiatives*, the local groups identified, honed, and bundled strategic initiatives that met two requirements—first, they took advantage of local resources and opportunities to advance the local food systems; second, they worked together to promote relevant aspects of Slow Money's mission (Table 3).

Across the four pioneer local groups, my analysis revealed stark variation in the opportunities identified and the mission-oriented local initiatives pursued.

Leaders of Slow Money Boston discovered that neither the state/local government nor accredited investors paid attention to the local food system, and community relationships were severely limited by geography and lifestyle. They hosted public meetings to familiarize local investors with Slow Money's principles and the idea of investing in local food enterprises; yet despite strong attendance, they struggled to attract individual investors. As Julia, co-founder and local leader of Slow Money Boston, noted, “Investors are shy about announcing themselves.” Under these circumstances, “igniting the local community” and “promoting pooled investing” became priorities for Slow Money Boston. As part of the initiative “igniting the local community,” they held regular meetings to raise awareness about Slow Money's mission; build community; let entrepreneurs showcase their businesses; and educate entrepreneurs and investors about opportunities to invest in the local food system, including new investing vehicles. Initially, Boston local leaders viewed investment clubs as a stepping stone to “facilitating peer-to-peer investing.” In 2011, 14 investors from Slow Money Boston created an LLC and pooled their money in an investment club to make joint investments in local food businesses, sharing both risks and returns. However, the investment club failed to attract entrepreneurs and generate a pipeline, likely due to the high interest rate charged (9%) and a long process to



TABLE 3 Relationships between strategic opportunities for Slow Money's mission and mission-oriented local initiatives.

Pioneer local groups	Understanding of local resources and needs	Strategic opportunities for slow money's mission	Mission-oriented local initiatives	Illustrative quotes
Slow Money Boston	The local community may be a resource for local food entrepreneurs if it is properly educated about the challenges and opportunities in the local food system.	Socializing the local community into Slow Money's principles and mission may help them appreciate investment opportunities in the local food system.	Igniting the local community Using Slow Money meetings to raise awareness about its mission, build community, educate entrepreneurs and investors about opportunities (e.g., new investing vehicles), and let entrepreneurs showcase their businesses	We've certainly got a lot of people excited and interested. We've got people coming to our events because they're curious to see what's going on around town. (<i>Julia, local leader, Slow Money Boston</i>)
			Promoting pooled investing Using online crowdfunding platforms (e.g., Kiva) or investment clubs as an entry point to build a community of investors and facilitate small loans (up to \$10,000)	[In an investment club] You get 15 people together, 20 people together, they each put in their money, you tell the world that you are making loans to small food businesses, you get applications, you look at them, you make the loans, you get paid your interest, you recycle the money. (<i>Eric, local leader, Slow Money Boston</i>)
Slow Money NC/NYC	Local investors and the community are willing to provide both financial and nonfinancial support to local food entrepreneurs but need help to form personal ties with each other and with the entrepreneurs.	Engaging the segment of the local community that is willing to support entrepreneurs may lead to favorable investment terms, knowledge sharing, and other nonfinancial resources.	Facilitating peer-to-peer investing Building relationships with the community to give access to low-interest peer-to-peer loans or equity investments; collateralized loans and equity investments range from small to large (\$3000–\$200,000).	I'm not someone who watches my money. I just like the fact that I know where it is, and who it's helping, and what they're doing, and that I can go visit. So, yeah, it's the direct relationship part. (<i>Jane, investor, Slow Money NC</i>)
			Highlighting nonfinancial resources	We consider our responsibility really to be to both communities [entrepreneurs and investors], to finding ways to help



TABLE 3 (Continued)

Pioneer local groups	Understanding of local resources and needs	Strategic opportunities for slow money's mission	Mission-oriented local initiatives	Illustrative quotes
Slow Money Maine	Varied resources that are available to sustainable local food businesses can be combined to identify and support large-scale projects necessary to foster entrepreneurial growth.	Combining multiple types of local resources may enhance investors' knowledge and entrepreneurs' options and help with the pursuit of infrastructural projects that benefit multiple parties.	<p>Focusing on fostering opportunities for coaching, advice, moral support, shared connections, and other kinds of nonfinancial resources</p> <p>Convening diverse actors with shared interests Using Slow Money meetings to connect around the mission and to coordinate efforts of individual investors, local agencies, and foundations</p>	<p>entrepreneurs access different forms of capital. ... One thing we're going to focus on is educating entrepreneurs about what those different sources of capital are. At what stage in the business are they appropriate? (<i>Claude, investor, Slow Money NYC</i>)</p> <p>Bonnie [founder of Slow Money Maine] ... has attracted a wide range of people including: farmers, fishermen, foundations that [are] giving money into this sector or also investing their money into it, government people, nonprofit people. It's come one, come all. It's free. And so she's really created a wide network of diverse people around farm businesses. (<i>Linzee, local leader, Slow Money Maine</i>)</p> <p>She [Bonnie] helped connect me with Maine Farmland Trust ... who then connected us with some members of this Slow Money community who were really inspired by the project ... We ended up getting \$50,000 from a family and that loan was insured by Maine Farmland Trust, so that family felt very safe. (<i>Ben, entrepreneur, Slow Money Maine</i>)</p>
			<p>Orchestrating and complementing resources Amplifying resources for entrepreneurs by complementing individual investors with nonprofits offering matching grants, loan loss reserve funds, and technical assistance programs; small- to large-sized (\$1000–\$500,000) collateralized loans and equity investments</p>	

secure a small amount of money (\$5000 to \$10,000). As Julia admitted, “Finding entrepreneurs that need investors and finding investors that want to invest in entrepreneurs and getting the two to meet and making it happen—I think that’s where we’ve struggled.” After realizing the investment club model did not meet the needs of local entrepreneurs, Slow Money Boston experimented with other means of “promoting pooled investing.” Taking advantage of the Massachusetts Crowdfunding Exemption and the Federal Regulation Crowdfunding,⁵ they began holding events where businesses presented their Direct Public Offering (DPO) and advertising online crowdfunding campaigns for local food businesses.

In NC and NYC, “doing Slow Money” translated into two mission-oriented local initiatives: “facilitating peer-to-peer investing” and “highlighting nonfinancial resources” to support local farms and food businesses. Both initiatives used local resources by engaging local investors and other community members who were willing to offer favorable investment terms, encouragement, business advice, and connections that provided opportunities for venture growth. As was the case in Boston, local leaders in NC and NYC first experimented with other initiatives that were ill-suited to their local conditions.

For instance, Slow Money NC briefly tried Community Sourced Capital, an online crowdfunding platform consistent with “promoting pooled investing.” But virtual outreach seemed less natural and proved less successful in NC than direct connections, and the group shifted its focus to “facilitating peer-to-peer investing.” As local leader Carol explained, after listening to Woody Tasch, she realized that Slow Money NC could tap into the community’s generosity and trust to obtain small loans for local food entrepreneurs: “When we heard Woody talk, kind of a light bulb went off.” In NC, however, investors were mostly non-accredited, which prevented entrepreneurs from making formal community pitches. Local leaders therefore acted as matchmakers to enable small-to-medium collateralized loans (\$1000–\$20,000). For larger amounts, multiple investors made loans to the same entrepreneurs, independently of each other. Investors aligned their investments with personal values, choosing to help food-based entrepreneurs even if it involved late payments or below-market interest rates. One lender told me she was willing to risk more than a bank or mortgage company since her loans were based on friendship. Farmers and cheesemakers Fabian and Sandra emphasized the importance of the local investors’ moral support: “All these people are willing to help you succeed.”

In NYC, local leaders initially attempted to partner with other nonprofits, but their efforts were largely unsuccessful given Slow Money’s limited track-record and the fierce competition for funding. Because “convening diverse actors with shared interests” was not a suitable initiative in their local context, NYC leaders turned their attention to “facilitating peer-to-peer investing.” The prevalence of high-net-worth individuals led to the creation of Foodshed NY, an angel investor network for local food businesses. As Derek, founder and leader of Slow Money NYC, explained, “The goal at first was really just to find like-minded people to share ideas and intentions with, and find our way toward maybe some collaborative undertaking together.” Collaboration among investors was key because most of them had limited knowledge of the unique challenges of food businesses. As Derek noted, “Investors needed a lot of support in order to develop the relationships with the entrepreneurs that were more organic and less

⁵The Massachusetts Crowdfunding Exemption, approved in 2015, offers small businesses a simplified path to sell securities to non-accredited investors who are Massachusetts residents. The Federal Regulation Crowdfunding, passed in 2016, allows small businesses to raise equity or debt from mainstream investors through an SEC-registered online crowdfunding platform (funding portal).



driven by just pure ‘I need your money.’” Through Foodshed NY, individual accredited investors developed relationships with local entrepreneurs. By paying an annual fee, investors could attend formal pitches by entrepreneurs who were seeking medium-to-large-sized (\$20,000–\$200,000) equity investments or loans. Investors shared information with each other during the due diligence process but invested independently, often becoming mentors to the entrepreneurs. The development of personal ties between investors and local food entrepreneurs became part of the mission-oriented local initiative “highlighting nonfinancial resources.” Slow Money NYC’s meetings, separate from the angel investor network’s meetings, educated entrepreneurs and investors on opportunities such as investment tools and legal protection of brand. They also allowed entrepreneurs to receive feedback on their products and early-stage ideas.

In Maine, mission-oriented local initiatives such as “convening diverse actors with shared interests” and “orchestrating and complementing resources” reflected the belief that available resources could enhance investors’ knowledge, entrepreneurs’ options, and the pursuit of infrastructural projects benefiting multiple parties. From the beginning, local leader and founder Bonnie, who had a background in organic farming, brought together a variety of people—farmers, bankers, investment advisors, and activists—to discuss Slow Money’s mission. Bonnie viewed the local group as a collaborative endeavor combining the efforts of individuals and organizations interested in improving the regional food system. In addition to investors willing to pool their money in investment clubs or make individual peer-to-peer loans, Maine’s farming heritage offered many resources for food businesses. As Linzee, a local leader and investor of Slow Money Maine, noted: “We have a strong farming ecosystem. ... We have a lot of farmers. They have good training programs. They have good peer networks ... free access to business planning.” Coordinating these resources to foster entrepreneurial growth became core to Slow Money Maine’s mission-oriented local initiatives. Lynn, an entrepreneur who made artisanal tortillas with heritage corn, took advantage of Slow Money Maine’s ability to connect entrepreneurs with local organizations such as Coastal Enterprises and the Portland Economic Development Corporation, obtaining help with her business plan and a much-needed small business loan: “They build, they foster ... they make connections.” Ben, a butcher who collaborated with local dairy farms to bring back cow-calf production in Maine, appreciated the way Slow Money helped him refine and grow his business: “There is some real technical assistance that happens through that community. ... Money is not just flowing out of the Slow Money community. I think it’s there and there’s potential for investment and that’s certainly something that should be recognized and appreciated, but there’s a lot of other good things.”

As the examples above show, *crafting mission-oriented local initiatives* involved intense search and experimentation among the local leaders of Slow Money Boston, NYC, NC, and Maine as they sought to narrow down initiatives to those that aligned with both Slow Money’s mission and their local resources and needs.

4.2 | Forming local strategies for social innovation

Over time, different bundles of local, mission-oriented initiatives became dominant in each group, reflecting varied interpretations of Slow Money’s mission. In Boston, “igniting the local community” and “promoting pooled investing” were associated with showing the community an opportunity for change; in NC and NYC, “facilitating peer-to-peer investing” and “highlighting nonfinancial resources” were viewed as a means to secure resources for change by nurturing entrepreneur-investor relationships; finally, in Maine, “convening diverse actors with

shared interests” and “orchestrating and complementing resources” were geared toward building infrastructure for change in the local and regional food systems (Table 4).

Even though each group's initiatives were imbued with their own meaning, local leaders and members felt they were contributing to Slow Money's mission tenets, namely, “investing in small food enterprises and local food systems; connecting investors to their local economies; and, building the nurture capital industry” (Slow Money, 2010a). They saw that other groups had different approaches and results; however, they also recognized that each group's circumstances were unique. As reflected in the narratives of local leaders and other Slow Money members, reconciling their actions with the national mission helped them feel part of the larger organization while offering clarity on what they were accomplishing and what else they needed to do.

In Boston, local leaders like Lisa, an investment professional, were disappointed with the group's limited ability to facilitate investments: “North Carolina and Maine in particular have had a lot of success in terms of actually funding businesses, and Boston, ... we've had less investing going on.” Yet, the same local leaders also believed their initiatives were aligned with local conditions, used effective strategies to create opportunities for change, and had successfully generated interest in small, local food businesses—one of the key elements of Slow Money's mission. According to Julia, “igniting the local community” and “promoting pooled investing” meant they were “keeping our money where we live. Building healthy communities.” By facilitating encounters between prospective local investors and local entrepreneurs, and by promoting new financial products and services such as pooled investing, they were satisfying the mission tenet of “connecting investors to their local economies.”

The positive track record of Slow Money NC made leaders confident that “facilitating peer-to-peer investing” and “highlighting nonfinancial resources” satisfied the mission tenet of “investing in small food enterprises and local food systems.” Lyle, co-founder of Slow Money NC, was especially proud of the number and volume of loans resulting from their ability to tap into the generosity and trust of the community: “We're a big deal because we did something. Because the national gathering's full of investment counselors and financial this, and people who haven't done anything.” Slow Money NC and peer-to-peer lending often were cited by other local leaders as the quintessence of Slow Money. As Michelle from Slow Money SoCal acknowledged, “The real intimacy of Slow Money is the Carol model, where you are sitting across [from] somebody and you really know them.” At the same time, Carol explained that she sought to ensure continuous community support for Slow Money's mission by holding regular meetings and using referrals to attract new actors: “People that have already made loans will bring friends that want to make loans.”

Like NC, Slow Money NYC leveraged the abundance of angel investors to enable peer-to-peer investing in local food enterprises, thus fulfilling the mission tenet of “investing in small food enterprises and local food systems.” However, as Derek admitted, pursuing equity investments had some drawbacks compared to pooled investing: “If we had done an investment club, I think we would've deployed smaller amounts of capital, [but] we would've captured and retained more people.” To augment the investor pool and pursue the mission tenet of “connecting investors to their local economies,” Slow Money NYC also tried “igniting the local community” and “promoting pooled investing.” Not only did it hold frequent and regular meetings with entrepreneurs and prospective investors, but it also used Kiva campaigns to facilitate crowdfunding. As Claude, an angel investor, explained: “Our goal is really to find ways to encourage that community to develop, encourage entrepreneurs to understand investors better, and set proper expectations.”



TABLE 4 Forming local strategies by connecting bundles of initiatives with the central mission.

Pioneer local groups	Mission-oriented local initiatives	How bundles of local initiatives contribute to mission	Local strategies for social innovation
Slow Money Boston	Igniting the local community + Promoting pooled investing	Slow Money Boston shows an opportunity for change to the community Our goals are based on Woody's theories. I think in reality now, it's more of a "let's just try and connect people and facilitate investment into food and ag, and a more sustainable food system and education." (Joel, local leader, Slow Money Boston)	DEMOING THE MISSION TO ATTRACT INITIAL SUPPORT
Slow Money NC Slow Money NYC	Facilitating peer-to-peer investing + Highlighting nonfinancial resources	Slow Money NC/NYC secure resources for change by nurturing entrepreneur-investor relationships [Slow Money is] a little bit like when you loan money to a friend, but you make them write you an IOU [...] the people who make the loans, make the loans aware that there is an element of risk in it [...] The beneficial part [...] to the borrower, and to your community is, that you aren't going to suddenly turn around and call the entire loan, like a bank could, or a mortgage company could. (Anonymous investor, Slow Money NC) When you ask me to describe the role of Slow Money, I'm careful to use the word catalyst because Slow Money is not the investor. Slow Money is not going to invest money. We don't have the tools, we don't have the capital, we don't have the network, we don't have the community. But our goal is really to find ways to encourage that community to develop, encourage entrepreneurs to understand investors better, and set proper expectations. (Claude, investor, Slow Money NYC)	FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS WITH ACTORS KEY TO THE MISSION
Slow Money Maine	Convening diverse actors with shared interests + Orchestrating and complementing resources	Slow Money Maine builds infrastructure for change Slow Money [Maine] has been more focused on food infrastructure businesses rather than small individual farms or small businesses—to try to really lend the bulk of money to food processing, for example, that would benefit a number of farms or a number of fishermen; to build that infrastructure so that the capacity is greater and ... farms can actually find outlets for their product. (Noah, entrepreneur, Slow Money Maine)	AMPLIFYING THE ECOSYSTEM TO SCALE THE MISSION

Finally, Slow Money Maine's leaders believed their initiatives contributed to the mission tenet of "building the nurture capital industry." By "convening diverse actors with shared interests" and "orchestrating and complementing resources" from individuals and organizations, they were able to foster infrastructure investments. Between 2010 and 2015, Slow Money Maine facilitated more than \$10 million in loans, grants, and equity to 76 farms and food businesses. Investment amounts varied, but large food processing businesses sourcing from local farms were prioritized and received the lion's share. Maine's leaders emphasized their group's ability to achieve large-scale impact by creating a ripple effect:

A lot of the local or the county economic development groups were all at various stages of engagement around agriculture and the food system, and one of the things that Slow Money [Maine] really helped to do was kind of catalyze all those people and sort of bring them together in one room at least every few months to listen to entrepreneurs to give up details to what they're working on and really start to integrate a little bit more what the efforts were. (Noah, entrepreneur, Slow Money Maine)

Mission-oriented local initiatives represented the ways local leaders capitalized on strategic opportunities. Each of the three bundles of local initiatives in Table 4 reflect one of three local strategies used to accomplish core tenets of Slow Money's mission. *Demoing the mission to attract initial support* helped with "connecting investors to their local economies." *Fostering relationships with actors key to the mission* facilitated "investing in small food enterprises and local food systems." Finally, *amplifying the ecosystem to scale the mission* was instrumental to "building the nurture capital industry."

4.2.1 | Demoing the mission to attract initial support

To connect investors to their local economy, local leaders in Boston combined "igniting the local community" through a mix of in-person activities and virtual outreach with "promoting pooled investing" by means of investment clubs or crowdfunding. This bundle of initiatives comprised the local strategy I named *Demoing the mission to attract initial support*, which built community by sharing the benefits that Slow Money Boston provided:

We create the space and opportunity for entrepreneurs to showcase their businesses, create symbiotic relationships, and tap into resources that will help them build sustainable, productive enterprises. In doing so, we provide a venue for investors to learn about opportunities to channel capital into the food system. (Slow Money Boston, Mission/Vision Statement)

Gathering investors, entrepreneurs, and foodies for both virtual and in-person meetings reinforced their connections with each other while simultaneously providing entrepreneurs with the opportunity to explain their businesses to prospective investors who shared their interests and values. Investment clubs offered streamlined opportunities for pooled investing:

You get 15 people together, 20 people together, they each put in their money, you tell the world that you are making loans to small food businesses, you get



applications, you look at them, you make the loans, you get paid your interest, you recycle the money. It was really simple, elegant, and it felt like that's the kind of impact that everybody who is coming to these Slow Money meetings wants to make, and here's a way to do it. (Eric, local leader, Slow Money Boston)

Similarly, online crowdfunding platforms such as Kiva minimized risk and lowered the financial bar for investors, since the requirements for individual contributions were low (\$25 or more), but built up to small loans (\$5000–\$10,000) at 0% interest. Pooled investing thus both facilitated connections and provided a pathway toward Slow Money's mission of making local investing more accessible.

4.2.2 | Fostering relationships with actors key to the mission

For local leaders in NC and NYC, the strategy I called *fostering relationships with actors key to the mission* was necessary to facilitate “investing in small food enterprises and local food systems.” This, in turn, was important for building a healthier and more resilient community:

[As a lender] you feel grateful that you have a chance to use your powers for good ... because they [the entrepreneurs] do match your values of improving soil fertility, of building resilience in the foodshed, and improving the local economy. (Carol, local leader, Slow Money NC)

This strategy acknowledged that both investors and entrepreneurs were instrumental to accomplish Slow Money's mission: “The goal of Slow Money is to help move people toward investing more in local food and to create opportunities for the entrepreneurs to connect to investors. It's a two-sided mission that's focused on both the supply side of money and the demand side of money” (Christine, entrepreneur/local leader, Slow Money NYC). “Highlighting nonfinancial resources” was deemed equally important as “facilitating peer-to-peer investing”: “For me, [Slow Money is] one of those things that ... brings like-minded people together to accomplish the goals that we would independently feel intimidated to do or restricted. And it's a support group ... it's really hard for me to speak in front of people, but they give you the confidence” (Marty, entrepreneur, Slow Money NC).

4.2.3 | Amplifying the ecosystem to scale the mission

Finally, “building the nurture capital industry” required the ability to leverage different types of resources. To this end, Slow Money Maine sought to build infrastructure rather than simply secure funds or technical assistance for entrepreneurs:

It's not just about getting money from one person to one business; it's about how do we build the resources we need together here in this state, to have the food system that we envision? And what are the infrastructure pieces? What support is needed? (Jonah, entrepreneur, Slow Money Maine)

The strategy I called *amplifying the ecosystem to scale the mission*—which consisted of both “convening diverse actors with shared interests” and “orchestrating and complementing

resources”—aimed to achieve large-scale impact. Local leaders pursuing this strategy facilitated resource amplification through partnerships with local nonprofits that offered matching grants or technical assistance programs, as well as foundations sponsoring loan loss reserve funds. For example, Slow Money Maine favored infrastructure that fulfilled the needs of multiple entrepreneurs, such as processing plants. Entrepreneurs made informal community pitches and formal pitches before investment clubs or accredited investors, securing small to large, collateralized loans (\$1000–\$500,000) and equity.

Taken together, these three emergent local strategies offered inspiration to newly formed groups as they crafted their own initiatives. However, without a proper codification of strategies and corresponding mission-oriented local initiatives, prospective local leaders could be confused about how to incorporate these approaches within their contexts. The final step to ensure strategic alignment with the mission required that the central leadership legitimize and promote these varied approaches across the network. These mechanisms are outlined in the last phase of Slow Money's strategy formation and diffusion, *curating strategies for social innovation*.

4.3 | Curating strategies for social innovation

At its inception, Slow Money did not have a formal strategy to support the development of sustainable local food systems. Slow Money National had a very lean structure, consisting of founder and chairman Woody Tasch, a vice president, and one or two staff people helping with the website and social media. The primary focus was sharing Slow Money's mission and sparking debate through online communications, Woody's speaking engagements, and larger meetings. At national gatherings, Woody and other thought leaders gave inspirational talks, while key practitioners in food, farming, and local investing imparted their knowledge to investors, entrepreneurs, and food enthusiasts. Local groups formed spontaneously, spearheaded by individuals enthused by these conversations. During these initial years (2010–2011), as local leaders developed and bundled together mission-oriented local initiatives, the central leadership was observing closely.

As Woody explained, he saw an opportunity to rely on local leaders' ingenuity to develop local strategies through experimentation, variation, and curation:

I want to encourage my own neighbors and friends to do it without any intermediaries, just taking their own money and putting it right into a farm. Since there are no real structures set up to do that, ... it takes a lot of gumption for the early people who were starting to do it. ... We haven't really created an easy way, just a few simple ways that people can do this.

Curating strategies for social innovation became important as the organization grew, and local leaders became more vocal in asking Slow Money National to provide coordination. Pioneer local leaders were frustrated that Woody saw himself as a thinker rather than an organizer. In response, Woody agreed to help establish communication channels across the organization to facilitate sharing and comparison of local strategies. For local leaders, Slow Money's retreats, webinars, and educational workshops became venues to gain legitimacy for their local strategies and cohere around Slow Money's mission. Carol noted that a 2011 leadership retreat failed to identify a suitable governance form for the organization but succeeded in creating cohesion among the local groups: "If you had wanted to do team building, you couldn't have done it



better. Because we came away, if nothing else, with relationships with each other, because we'd been in this two-day retreat that we not only attended, but we kind of invented." For about a year after the retreat, Slow Money's central leadership facilitated conference calls and webinars among local leaders. Then, daily tasks took priority, and calls and webinars temporarily ceased.

In 2012, Woody decided to rely on pioneer local leaders to disseminate local strategies nationally. He formed a steering committee that included leaders from Maine, NC, Northern Cal, and NYC. Committee members were tasked with discussing issues that were of interest to the local groups and sharing local strategies. Pioneer leaders became strategy ambassadors across the organization, which by then included 14 local groups. Carol described her experience in NC in a book she promoted nationally. Marco and Arno, who ran Slow Money Northern Cal, diffused Slow Money's mission and strategies through speaking engagements and blog posts on the national website. In 2013, before the national gathering in Boulder, CO, local leaders planned a retreat. Though the central leadership was only marginally involved, it saw the retreat's value and took ownership during national gatherings in 2014 and 2017.

By 2014, *curating strategies for social innovation*—which included selecting, organizing, and diffusing the local strategies—had reached maturity. The central organization formally legitimized the local strategies of the pioneer groups by including them in a Slow Money strategy tool kit. Additionally, it issued guidelines to ensure consistency among the local groups and to protect brand integrity. As Slow Money's brand guidelines stated, "While direct local action is fundamental to the Slow Money movement, the success of such local action is enhanced by the larger narrative and brand that we are all building together" (Slow Money, 2014, p. 17). At the 2014 national gathering, a 140-page binder that included the brand guidelines, a tool kit, reflections from Woody Tasch and local leaders, and other resources was distributed to new and prospective local leaders. The tool kit offered details on the mission-oriented initiatives that comprised the strategies of the pioneer groups. It included links to the groups' websites, deal documentation, and other information on investing, and recommended readings on investing in local food systems. Yet, Woody insisted that Slow Money's mission was the coordinating mechanism, not the brand guidelines. The latter "were meant to be a little bit of glue, but very gentle and non-controlling." For example, the local groups were required to meet annually, make at least one investment a year, and report their activity to Slow Money National.

Curating strategies for social innovation was important to sustain and grow the young organization, offering inspiration and guidance to both old and new groups. Pioneer leaders like Julia from Slow Money Boston took inspiration from other local strategies: "We had somebody from Maine talking about the credit union that they are starting, and Derek from New York. ... And, I just sort of sat there in awe like, 'What could we be doing in Massachusetts?'" Newer leaders like Jeff from Slow Money SLO, a local group founded in 2012, emphasized the importance of learning from others: "I always leave the conferences with pages of ideas ... some of which we end up trying to adopt." The central leadership saw this broad range of mission-oriented initiatives as an organizational strength. As Mike, vice president of Slow Money, summarized, "We celebrate diversity." Local leaders shared this sentiment and felt appreciated for their contributions. Tim of Slow Money Northwest stated that local groups implemented the Slow Money mission "in our areas and made it work for what our region needed and what our personal skills and motivations were or are." Joel of Slow Money Boston agreed that Slow Money National did "let Maine do their thing ... let North Carolina do their thing ... let Boston do their thing."

As shown in Table 5, *curating strategies for social innovation* involved collaboration between local and national leaders. Mechanisms included developing tools for knowledge sharing and

promoting the alignment of local strategies with the central mission. Slow Money's leadership enlisted current local leaders as strategy ambassadors to educate and inspire prospective local leaders, while information about the initiatives that comprised local groups' strategies was featured prominently on Slow Money's national website and in newsletters and webinars. Drawing on this wealth of information, local leaders were able to choose the initiatives that best aligned with their local conditions. However, local groups did not necessarily combine these initiatives in the same way. For instance, Slow Money SLO, whose supportive local community resembled that of NC, embraced the strategy of *fostering relationships with actors key to the mission*, particularly through peer-to-peer lending:

A lot of the people were very interested in helping our local co-op grocery store because they needed to move into a new location. ... That was our first set of loans—peer-to-peer loans. ... We've done 11 at this point after about two and a half years. Almost a half a million dollars in loans. (Jeff, local leader, Slow Money SLO)

Over time, Slow Money SLO sought to expand existing funding sources and began promoting pooled investing using the online crowdfunding platform Kiva. Yet, local leader Jeff did not feel that it was a priority to ignite the local community through public events:

A lot of the groups have created a lot of structure: forms to be filled out by investors, procedures, online resources. It's all good stuff, but we just haven't done that. I think we're different in that we've been reasonably successful in our commitment to the principles and accomplishing some things without having to do a lot of that. We don't have the events for the most part. I've had two events—one each in the last couple of years—but they've been very small events. We don't have the high volume of entrepreneurs coming to us that we need to have a showcase. It's just not there. Would we pull more out of the woodwork if we had an event? Probably. ... When I try to form an event committee to think about doing an event, I don't get a lot of enthusiasm.

Like Slow Money SLO and NC, Slow Money NE Kansas relied primarily on peer-to-peer lending to pursue the strategy of *fostering relationships with actors key to the mission*. However, local leader Nancy took inspiration from Slow Money Maine to help one of their local farmers convene actors (e.g., investors, suppliers, and customers) and orchestrate resources to support two infrastructural projects—a non-GMO poultry seed hub and a meat processing plant—that benefitted the entire region:

She [the farmer] won \$60,000 in a Slow Money loan—which was like zero interest and very friendly terms. She leveraged that into, all together, almost a quarter million dollars of more loans, Slow Money loans. So she not only started the non-GMO food, seed hub, but was also able to purchase a USDA certified meat processing plant which was about to go be shuttered. ... And the real joy in that has been not just for the family with two new businesses on their farm but a whole wave of new activities and new commitments from the region around her farm. Because she has large-scale conventional growers knocking at her door asking ... if



TABLE 5 Mechanisms for fostering diffusion of pluralistic strategies.

Mechanism	Developing tools to promote knowledge sharing	Promoting alignment of pluralistic strategies with mission
CENTRAL LEVEL	<p>Enlisting local leaders as strategy ambassadors</p> <p>The steering committee was formed in probably 2012, and it functioned until 2014. ... They were all very smart, active—they were doing a lot. I felt like they could help. I said, “Will you help me? You’ll be like proxies for the rest of the network.” (<i>Woody, founder, Slow Money National</i>)</p>	<p>Celebrating diversity within the Slow Money brand</p> <p>We celebrate diversity. They’re all doing various initiatives of their own, and so there’s not like a cookie cutter network, let’s say. (<i>Mike, vice president, Slow Money National</i>)</p>
LOCAL LEVEL	<p>Absorbing and recombining strategies</p> <p>[At the masterclass] we had somebody from Maine talking about the credit union that they are starting, and Derek from New York was talking about the LION Group. (<i>Julia, local leader, Slow Money Boston</i>)</p> <p>We had a local leaders conference before the national gathering in Louisville [...] it was ... extremely interesting and educational and a great way to meet some of the other people around the country and come up with new ideas. (<i>Jeff, local leader, Slow Money SLO</i>)</p> <p>We’re comparing notes about who is doing what and adapting good ideas into the realities of your region. (<i>Tim, local leader, Slow Money Northwest</i>)</p>	<p>Accepting pluralistic strategies as part of the mission</p> <p>They [Slow Money National] have done a good job in letting the movement happen organically, and to just step back as chapters start spreading and start doing what they’re going to do based on the philosophy and not stepping in. (<i>Joel, local leader, Slow Money Boston</i>)</p> <p>The activities that occur on the ground are activities that are challenging, because we’re trying to get regular folks to invest in food and farming enterprises. There are a lot of securities laws around it ... And so each group has kind of developed its own way of being in the world, if you want. (<i>Marco, local leader, Slow Money Northern Cal</i>)</p> <p>I wouldn’t give Slow Money my money if it was just a national thing and not local, and I wouldn’t give Slow Money my volunteer energy if it was just a local thing without any larger umbrella. (<i>Arno, local leader, Slow Money Northern Cal</i>)</p>

they can switch over to non-GMO seeds so that they can provide grain to the seed hub.

Both Jeff and Nancy felt free to borrow local initiatives from the strategy tool kit since they accepted pluralistic strategies as part of the mission. This was the result of Slow Money National encouraging selective incorporation and emphasizing that a multitude of strategies was part of Slow Money’s brand. Jeff and Nancy thus were confident that when they incorporated other local initiatives, their groups remained committed to the mission.

This high level of autonomy meant, however, that it was particularly important to establish a common understanding of how different local strategies were connected to the national mission tenets, thereby ensuring strategic alignment between Slow Money National and its local groups (Table 6). During the 2014 national gathering, the central leadership made it clear that it viewed Slow Money’s brand as “a tool” for convening gatherings; connecting entrepreneurs,

TABLE 6 Alignment between local strategies and central mission.

Local strategy	How local strategies furthered the central mission	Central mission tenet fulfilled
Demoing the mission to attract initial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local leaders formed communities around the mission through live events, newsletters, traditional media, social media, word of mouth, and other forms of publicity. Small amounts of funding were deployed through pooled investing (e.g., investment clubs or crowdfunding) to demonstrate the potential impact of the mission and to get people onboard. 	Connecting investors to their local economies
Fostering relationships with actors key to the mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local leaders fostered relationships between like-minded entrepreneurs and investors; coaching and connections were offered to help entrepreneurs expand their networks and acquire nonfinancial resources. Medium amounts of funding were deployed through peer-to-peer loans, small grants, and equity investments. 	Investing in small food enterprises and local food systems
Amplifying the ecosystem to scale the mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local leaders orchestrated access to a diverse set of complementary resources (e.g., technical assistance programs referring entrepreneurs to institutional lenders or foundations giving grants to match or guarantee loans) for entrepreneurs and investors. Large amounts of funding resulted from resources reinforcing one another and supported large-scale and infrastructural projects (e.g., food hubs or food processing facilities). 	Creating infrastructure to nurture investor participation (building the nurture capital industry)

farmers, investors, philanthropists, and other stakeholders; and catalyzing “the flow of funds to a wide array of food businesses, while promoting public awareness of the importance of local sustainable food systems” (Slow Money, 2014, p. 14). This delineation of appropriate mission-aligned actions reinforced for local members that they were supporting Slow Money’s mission since the national leadership explicitly endorsed the strategies they already were implementing.

Because these local strategies were connected to the central tenets of Slow Money’s mission, there was organizational cohesion despite different local implementations. As Dorothy, an entrepreneur from Boston, explained: “Slow Money is wonderful because it lends itself to many, many different interpretations, and remains viable, and productive and useful, even though there seems to be not one model.”

5 | A MODEL OF STRATEGY FORMATION AND MISSION ALIGNMENT

Drawing on the findings above, I built a dynamic process model explaining strategy formation and mission alignment in multi-unit, mission-driven organizations (Figure 2).

This model best fits mission-driven organizations that pursue social innovation, defined as “the creation and implementation of new solutions to social problems” (Tracey & Stott, 2017, p. 51). Social innovation requires systemic change, often through decentralized decision-making and the recombination of existing products and services (Henderson, 2020). When local actors form strategies to accomplish their organizational mission, they first experiment with mission-

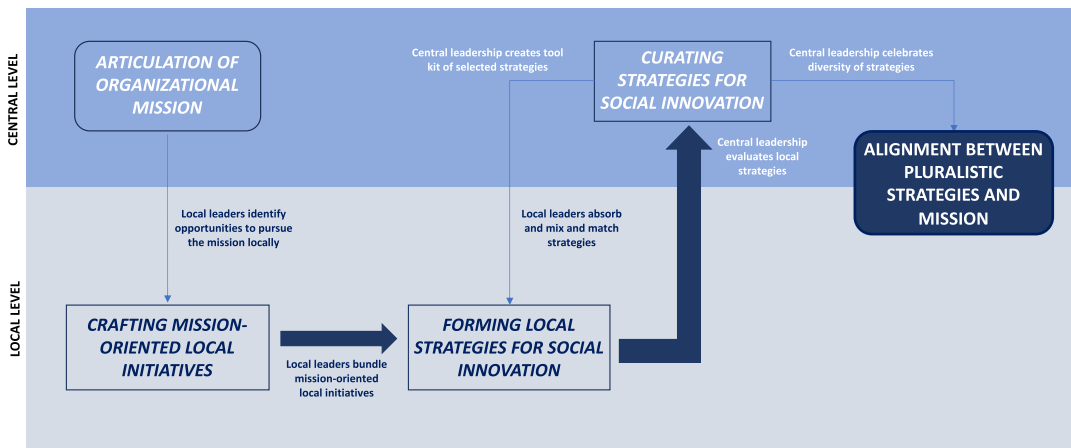


FIGURE 2 Strategy formation and mission alignment: Interplay of the local and national levels.

oriented local initiatives that address perceived local needs and leverage available resources. *Crafting mission-oriented local initiatives* is a mechanism that entails opportunity identification through an understanding of how to pursue the mission locally. Rather than being deliberate and imposed by the national organization, strategies for social innovation emerge on the ground, when local leaders bundle mission-oriented initiatives together on a stable basis. *Forming local strategies for social innovation* is contingent on local leaders discerning how to use local resources and combining different initiatives to further one or more of the mission tenets. Finally, *curating strategies for social innovation* is a key mechanism at the national level to support strategy diffusion and strategic alignment with the mission, thus enhancing coordination and innovation capabilities among current and prospective local leaders.

The model in Figure 2 breaks down the formation of mission-aligned strategies for social innovation into six components. The first component is the *articulation of the organizational mission*, which originates from the central organization. These statements inspire local leaders to identify strategic opportunities and generate a plurality of initiatives. By *crafting mission-oriented local initiatives*, local leaders connect the mission to the local context. This process involves analyzing local resources and needs and experimenting with initiatives that focus on the opportunities identified. Not all initiatives succeed, but those that do become dominant and contribute to *forming local strategies for social innovation*. A necessary condition for bundles of mission-oriented initiatives to aggregate up into strategies is that they effectively use local resources to fulfill one or more aspects of the mission. In the case of Slow Money, the three social innovation strategies tackled three different mission tenets. Finally, by *curating strategies for social innovation*, the central organization plays an active role in coordinating the local groups, thus ensuring alignment between their strategies and the mission. This mechanism draws attention to how the central leadership manages local initiatives by legitimizing emerging strategies and using a tool kit to codify knowledge and facilitate strategy diffusion and recombination.

Since the pursuit of one of the three local strategies in the model (or some combination of the three) depends on local needs, resources, and capabilities, changes in the environment can necessitate changes to the local strategies. For instance, once local leaders attract initial support for the mission, they may decide that *fostering relationships with actors key to the mission* will best advance the mission in the long-term. Alternatively, local groups may realize that one of

their resource streams is diminishing and prioritize attracting additional support for the mission.

The model offers a framework to understand strategy formation and mission alignment in three ways. First, it offers an empirically grounded explanation of how the autonomous initiative of local managers (e.g., Burgelman, 1983; Burgelman, 1991; Mintzberg, 1978; Noda & Bower, 1996) can spur social innovation: by setting intentions and broad goals at the central level (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985), allowing organic development of local strategies that fit different local environments, and then incorporating local strategies into a curated organizational strategy tool kit. Second, it shows that a central organization can use strategies developed by its local units to scale its mission, while simultaneously using the mission as a coordination device for pluralistic initiatives. Slow Money's central leadership let its local leaders experiment and then used the resulting strategies as living examples of how to accomplish its mission. This enhanced the mission's salience among existing groups and facilitated the recruitment of prospective local leaders. Third, this model offers a roadmap of how to accomplish an organizational mission by using a modular approach that pursues different mission tenets. Local leaders could choose the strategies that best fit their local circumstances and combine mission-oriented local initiatives that belonged to different strategies. Hence, this model is dynamic since strategies constantly change due to adaptation and recombination.

6 | DISCUSSION

This article contributes a grounded model of how multisite organizations pursuing social innovation can manage pluralistic local initiatives while cohering to their missions. I extend the literature on strategy formation by showing how mission can be leveraged to foster social innovation by inspiring bottom-up, pluralistic initiatives that harness local resources and address local needs. This study also suggests that an organization's central leadership can utilize its mission as a coordinating mechanism to promote mission-aligned local recombination of strategies.

6.1 | Fostering social innovation by supporting pluralistic initiatives

In this article, I show how Slow Money used cyclic sharing and repurposing of mission-oriented, pluralistic local initiatives and strategies to achieve mission alignment and social innovation.

These findings shed light on the generative role of mission as a driver of social innovation through the development of bottom-up, pluralistic initiatives that fit different local conditions. Strategy scholars have explored how corporate headquarters impact local strategic adaptation (e.g., Ghoshal & Nohria, 1989; Gupta, 1987; Joseph & Ocasio, 2012), while organizational scholars have suggested that mission helps form strategies by guiding the decision-making process at the local level (Farjoun, 2002; Simon, 1986). Yet, there is very little research on the relationship between organizational mission and strategy. The notion of umbrella strategies (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) suggests that when central leaders do not have full control of other organizational actors, they may offer local units a mission to accomplish and let them implement a series of initiatives, some of which eventually will morph into strategies. However, implementing strategies to pursue an organizational purpose is a daunting task, as “the ‘best



laid plans' often crash on the rocks of bureaucracy, politics, and an entrenched culture" (Ocasio et al., 2023, p. 13).

This ethnographic study explores the genesis of umbrella strategies "in situ," explaining the process by which local leaders of Slow Money Boston, NYC, NC, and Maine identified initiatives that aligned with both the Slow Money mission and their local conditions, and then bundled them together to form local strategies for social innovation that reflected their own interpretations of Slow Money's mission. The model identifies three local strategies for social innovation (*demoing the mission to attract initial support*, *fostering relationships with actors key to the mission*, and *amplifying the ecosystem to scale the mission*), each of them addressing different mission tenets ("connecting investors to their local economies," "investing in small food enterprises and local food systems," and "building the nurture capital industry," respectively). As the organization grew, Slow Money's central leadership played an important role in ensuring alignment between local strategies and the core mission by underscoring the contribution of different strategies to the mission and developing tools for knowledge sharing, thereby explicitly celebrating the diversity of approaches.

The Slow Money case demonstrates how permitting pluralistic strategies enriches the set of strategic initiatives available for recombination. When pioneer local leaders generated multiple initiatives based on their local needs and available local resources, the national organization encouraged reconciliation of these local strategies with at least one of the mission tenets. Local actors felt empowered by this process (Lawrence, 2017) since they were translating abstract mission tenets into concrete initiatives. It increased the local leaders' sense of purpose (Henderson & Van den Steen, 2015), as well as their ability to refine their strategies by integrating other local groups' initiatives. Additionally, the strategy tool kit curated by the central organization enabled parallel collective learning (Amin & Cohendet, 2004; Miner & Anderson, 1999; Perez-Aleman, 2011) among the local groups and facilitated the development of prospective local leaders.

Another aspect on which I shed light is the interrelationship between top managers and organizational members during strategy-making (Hart, 1992; Nonaka, 1988; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989). Through my fieldwork, I tracked how Slow Money's mission was interpreted and adapted locally, as well as how the central leadership altered its vision due to local action. While the fundamental mission of Slow Money did not change, feedback from its local groups did impact the national leadership's thought process. For instance, after discovering that some of the local groups were having difficulty finding investors, founder Woody Tasch became more interested in exploring strategies and tools that skewed toward philanthropy. Viewing local emergent strategies as learning opportunities is consistent with Mintzberg and Waters's (1985, p. 270) notion of "strategic learning," or "how managers learn from the experiences of their own organizations."

The interplay of an overarching mission and pluralistic local strategies was a defining trait of Slow Money that the local leaders valued greatly. As Arno, co-leader of Slow Money Northern Cal, elaborated, "I have been donating money to the national nonprofit. ... I wouldn't give Slow Money my money if it was just a national thing and not local, and I wouldn't give Slow Money my volunteer energy if it was just a local thing without any larger umbrella." Yet, while decentralized decision-making may help organizations adapt to local conditions, coordinating multiple strategies introduces new challenges (Chen et al., 2019). This study illuminates how organizations can leverage their missions to support the alignment of pluralistic strategies.

6.2 | Leveraging the central mission to support strategic alignment across units

One of the advantages of decentralized decision-making is that local actors can form strategies that reflect their local contexts. However, when a mission is pursued in pluralistic ways, firms are at an increased risk of mission drift (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Grimes et al., 2019). Recent work on mission-driven organizations has pointed to the importance of nurturing stakeholders' emotional resonance with the organizational identity (e.g., Kouamé et al., 2022) to prevent mission drift. Slow Money's central leadership encouraged its local groups to find their own ways to pursue the mission locally, even at the expense of control and efficiency. Importantly, by *curating strategies for social innovation*, the central leadership also celebrated the diverse strategies that resulted, following an approach similar to what Ashcraft (2001) calls "Organized Dissonance." The mission helped coordinate the dialectic between top management and the local strategic initiatives (Burgelman, 1983; Noda & Bower, 1996) by offering a common ground. By legitimizing a plurality of local strategies and encouraging their diffusion and recombination, Slow Money National created a roadmap for local leaders to link bundles of mission-oriented local initiatives with the pursuit of different mission tenets.

At the time of my study, Slow Money was a young organization, with limited resources to support its local groups. Similar to a franchisor, Slow Money National owned a concept and a brand, but as a volunteer-based organization, it could not exert control locally. Slow Money maintained its organizational cohesion and supported its growth by celebrating and diffusing diverse local strategies and providing guidance to newly formed groups on how different strategies satisfied different mission tenets. Local strategies became organizational strategies when the national organization's narrative clarified how they fed back to the mission. This helped local leaders strengthen the alignment and resonance between the plurality of local strategies and the organizational mission.

In line with the literature on multi-unit organizations (e.g., Bradach, 1998), the coordinating capabilities of Slow Money National—though never outstanding—did improve over time. The central leadership developed tools to assist its local groups, but local oversight was restrained, and the decision to adopt a gently guiding approach was an emergent rather than planned strategy (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Since Slow Money National could exert limited control over its volunteer-based local groups, even when it issued brand guidelines, requirements were nominal. Incentives for local leaders came mostly from a desire to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and the opportunity to exchange ideas and best practices through parallel collective learning (Amin & Cohendet, 2004; Miner & Anderson, 1999; Perez-Aleman, 2011). This suggests an important boundary condition for this study: a national organization with a set of broad or abstract principles that require translation to actualize. A mission that contains a multitude of ends can tolerate pluralistic means, including varied strategies. Mission alignment might be more difficult in organizations that have clear means without clear ends. Additionally, commitment to the mission is likely to be stronger in volunteer-based organizations, in which monetary incentives are absent.

6.3 | Conclusions

As with all ethnographic work, the findings of this article concern a specific phenomenon and may not be directly generalizable. Slow Money represents a unique type of multi-unit



organization. Its initiatives are decentralized because the organization is highly decentralized by design. This feature allowed me to gather granular data on how bundles of local initiatives become strategies, first at the local and then at the national level. Settings with characteristics similar to Slow Money include multi-unit organizations and organizations with limited resources and oversight that are pursuing complex goals, ill-suited to a one-size-fits-all approach. Organizations that match this profile often are those addressing environmental and societal challenges. For instance, we know that corporate donations are important to national disaster recovery (Ballesteros et al., 2017); that nonprofits contribute to reducing systemic inequality in developing countries by tackling health issues like access to water and sanitation (Mair et al., 2016); and that advocacy groups' participation in "search consortia" facilitates solutions to health, information, transportation, and energy challenges (Olsen et al., 2016). Yet, opportunities to expand upon strategies to address these "grand challenges" remain (Ferraro et al., 2015). Inductive methods such as theory building from cases and ethnography "can powerfully address grand challenges while also developing strong and insightful theory" (Eisenhardt et al., 2016, p. 1113).

In addition to being highly decentralized, Slow Money is guided by a strong social mission—a critical component for nonprofit organizations. However, mission also is relevant to the strategies of for-profit organizations. Pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies can be driven by a strong social mission, for example, such as finding a vaccine for a pandemic like COVID-19 or the cure for a rare disease. Moreover, while it may be true that any type of mission (including the maximization of shareholder value) can be "experientially meaningful, truly guiding the corporations' critical decisions and its distinctive competencies" (Ocasio et al., 2023, p. 14), aligning strategy and mission requires thinking about "the societal role for the corporation, as a source for sustainable economic growth and prosperity" (Ocasio et al., 2023, p. 14). In mission-driven organizations such as Slow Money, the formation of strategies to accomplish the mission is, by definition, consistent with social and environmental goals.

Finally, Burgelman (1983, p. 65) has argued that autonomous strategic behaviors are a prerogative of "large, resource-rich firms [that] are likely to possess a reservoir of entrepreneurial potential at operational levels that will express itself in autonomous strategic initiatives." In contrast, I show that autonomous mission-oriented local initiatives originate under varying levels of resource endowment, and that entrepreneurial potential manifests itself through an understanding of how local resources and opportunities align with different aspects of the mission. Mission alignment offers a chance for strategic renewal—including the development of social innovation—for underfunded, mission-driven organizations. Irrespective of the resources at their disposal, organizations addressing large-scale environmental and societal challenges can benefit from a better understanding of how alignment with social mission fosters systemic change, and how various approaches allow for the pursuit of social innovation. The richer the variety of modes of organizing available, the greater the range of solutions that society can bring to social problems (Rao, 1998).

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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