Article

Champions of Social Procurement in the Australian Construction Industry: Evolving Roles and Motivations

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Abstract: There has been a recent proliferation of social procurement policies in Australia that target the construction industry. This is mirrored in many other countries, and the nascent research in this area shows that these policies are being implemented by an emerging group of largely undefined professionals who are often forced to create their own roles in institutional vacuums with little organisational legitimacy and support. By mobilising theories of how organisational champions diffuse innovations in other fields of practice, this paper contributes new insights into the evolving nature of these newly emerging roles and the motivations which drive these professionals to overcome the institutional inertia they invariably face. The results of semi-structured interviews, with fifteen social procurement champions working in the Australian construction industry, indicate that social procurement champions come from a wide range of professional backgrounds and bring diverse social capital to their roles. Linked by a shared sense of social consciousness, these champions challenge traditional institutional norms, practices, supply chain relationships, and traditional narratives about the concepts of value in construction. We conclude that, until normative standards develop around social procurement in the construction industry, its successful implementation will depend on external institutional pressures and the practical demonstration of what is possible in practice within the performative constraints of traditional project objectives.

Keywords: construction industry; champions; innovation; social innovation; social procurement; social value

1. Introduction

Social procurement involves the deliberate creation of social value by purchasing goods and services [1]. While this idea is not new [2], McNeill [3] conceptualised social procurement as a social innovation because it strategically repositions the procurement function as a tool for addressing an organisation's social objectives through the creation of new hybrid assemblages between organisations in the public, private and third sectors.

In contrast to the broader body of research on public procurement, sustainable procurement and green procurement, which has increased markedly since 2017, social procurement research is relatively new, especially in the field of construction [4,5]. The nascent body of social procurement research in the field of construction indicates that the implementation of social procurement in construction is challenging. For example, Murphy and Eadie [6] argue that social procurement is challenging to implement in the Irish construction industry because it requires the adaption of performance targets and accounting models to measure social value, and the creation of new linkages between disparate organisational functions such as procurement, sustainability and human resources. Loosemore et al. [7] showed that subcontractors in the Australian construction industries perceive social procurement

as a risk to safety, productivity, cost and quality. In Sweden, Troje and Andersson [8] argue that social procurement pushes the construction sector into a state of 'institutional instability.' This is because it disturbs incumbent institutional logics, relationships and practices. Troje and Kadefors [9], and Troje and Gluch [10,11], portray an uncertain and emerging institutional field in Sweden, which is being shaped by lone organisational actors (called Employment Requirement Professionals) who are engaging in ongoing 'institutional work' to create and legitimise social procurement in their organisations. While they did not use the term champion, the roles, activities and attributes that Troje and Gluch [10,11] describe, closely reflect the definitions of organisational champions in wider organisational studies research. In making this observation, we draw on organisational studies research which defines organisational champions as informal role holders who, through insightful, diplomatic, and skilled organisational lobbying, sell new ideas to others and protect them from inertia and attack by visibly, emotionally, and materially supporting the development process and enlisting the political support of other influential decision-makers [12–14].

Although many construction researchers have recognised the vital role of champions in driving construction innovation, this research has been largely confined to the implementation of economic, technological, and environmental innovations [15–19]. While both Barraket et al. [1] and McNeill [3] recognise the critical role of organisational champions in driving social procurement, they do not elaborate on the functions of such roles. Aside from the work of Troje and Gluch [10,11] and Troje and Andersson [8], there has been little research into the role of social innovation champions in implementing social innovations, such as social procurement, in the construction industry or in other industry contexts.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to this gap in the research by mobilising the organisational champion theory as a new conceptual lens to explore what these important actors do to promote social procurement in the construction industry. More specifically, two key research questions are addressed:

1. What motivates people to become champions of social procurement in the construction industry?
2. What is the nature of these evolving roles in the construction industry?

The objective of this paper is to advance, both empirically and conceptually, the emergence of social procurement as a distinct field of practice [1]. This research is important because, as Troje and Gluch [10] note, social procurement professionals are important carriers of social sustainability practices within the construction industry. Therefore, a better understanding the nature of these practices, how they promote that agenda in the face of significant institutional resistance and what motivates them to do so, is important for selecting the appropriate people for these critical roles and facilitating inter-organisational learning to advance sectoral practices in this area.

This article proceeds with an examination of organisational champion research to explore the strategies that champions employ to bring about change, highlighting the deficit concerning its application to social procurement in construction. Next, the research approach is outlined, and findings are distilled and discussed to address the above research questions.

2. Social Procurement Champions in Construction: Motivations and Roles

In exploring the two research questions posed above, laterally relevant research into the motivations and roles of organisational champions' areas of social enterprise, social innovation, and environmental sustainability can offer potentially helpful insights.

Concerning research question one, Loosemore and Higgon [20] argued that social intrapreneurs are motivationally distinguishable from their economic counterparts by a unique sense of accountability for what they do; a powerful sense of right and wrong; a strong sense of empathy towards those who are less fortunate; a sense of profound responsibility to their environment and communities; and a sense of moral outrage against injustice and inequity in society. Lewis and Cassells [21] found that sustainability champions in construction were motivated by a strong sense of responsibility to the community; commer-

cial opportunities for cost reduction/financial benefits from implementing sustainability initiatives; and compliance with sustainability legislation. Wood et al. [22] identified three types of sustainability champions: *saviours*; *nurturers*; and *strugglers*. Saviours believe that they are solving or resolving pressing environmental issues and use objective, positivist evidence to build their arguments. Nurturers focus on nurturing, growth and building empathetic relationships with colleagues to advocate and pursue organisational change. Strugglers are champions whose experiences are characterised by vulnerability, and thus they struggle to persuade others to their cause. More recently, Troje and Gluch [10] classified social procurement actors into three groups (idealists, problem-solvers and pragmatists), classifying their work as operational, co-creating and educational in nature. Idealists are altruistic and caring society builders who feel compelled to help others. Problem-solvers are driven by the intellectual challenge of finding a recipe that makes social procurement commercially viable. Pragmatists are driven by performative goals and compliance with political decisions, formal policies and completing a task with little sentiment.

Concerning research question two, research has traditionally depicted organisational champions as heroic, charismatic, and transformational leaders prepared to adopt and fight for a new idea by modifying and fitting it into a relevant organisational context [23–27]. Hargreaves [28] used social practice theory to conceptualise sustainability champions as 'carriers' of new ideas across organisations and functions, allowing them to co-design and refine hybrid practices over time, through trial-and-error and experimentation with new ideas. Reflecting this collaborative theme, Crosby and Bryson [29] describe social innovation champions as "monomaniacs with a vision" (p. 167) who persistently and creatively connect stakeholders and resourcing pools with opportunities to create social change. Later work by Crosby and Bryson [30] describes champions as strategic builders of cross-sector and multi-level relationships through self-sustaining 'mutual gain regimes'. Huxham and Vangen [31] describe champions as politically savvy, tireless organisers and promoters of change who are multilingual translators across different organisational and practice cultures, as well as factions. Similarly, Woolcott et al. [32] describe social innovation champions as 'value-adding connectors', and Molloy et al. [13] employ the concept of bricolage to show how social innovation champions 'make-do' with the limited resources at hand by mixing, recombining and reusing them in new ways to support an idea. According to Molloy et al. [13], social innovation champions engage in 'sensemaking' to persuade others to support their ideas. They also argue that the instability of prevailing organisational logics orientates champion sensemaking efforts in specific directions. For example, when opposing institutional logics are strong and stable as they are in construction [8], champions must direct their efforts externally to exert outside pressure to change organisations. In construction, this may involve lobbying construction clients to implement and enforce social procurement policies in projects. Molloy et al. [13] argue that hybrid solutions are more likely in this context, supporting recent references to the importance of cross-sector collaboration in implementing social procurement in construction [33]. Most recently, Troje and Andersson [8] argued that social procurement actors engaged in 'institution building work' at both operational and strategic levels. At the operational level, this work relies on references to hard facts and figures, doing the right thing, laws and regulations and the social impact of social procurement. With strategic-level arguments, work involves leveraging legitimate power to emphasise social procurement's commercial and socio-economic benefits. Earlier work by Troje [34] found that in the face of unsympathetic institutional norms, social procurement actors had to rely heavily on rhetorical strategies (ethos, pathos and logos) and market-based logic underpinned by a commercial, sales-related discourse, to persuade industry incumbents to implement social procurement. Building on this research, Troje and Gluch [10] found that social procurement champions in construction lacked a distinct "domain of practice" and relied on "self-made adjustable roles" (p. 67), which in turn relied on operational, educational and collaborative work and an organisational identity based on personal engagement rather than a formally defined

role. Troje and Gluch [10] described their role as "gardeners and teachers" (p. 66), planting seeds of change and growing other people into champions of social procurement.

Table 1 summarises the core literature in the field regarding the two research questions. The contribution of Table 1 is twofold. First, it synthesises the fragmented and limited research on organisational champions in the research questions. Second, in a more immediate contribution, it provides a framework to guide our methodological design, which is described in the following section.

Table 1. Analytical framework: drivers, roles and attributes of social procurement champions.

Research Question	Factors	Key References
1. What motivates people to become champions of social procurement in construction companies?	Altruism. Opportunities for addressing social problems in a new and more efficient way. Responsibility to the community. Making change for the better. Idealism.	[10,21]
	Inspiration from others. Personal experience of disadvantage and injustice. Social networks/encouragement from others.	[35]
	Personality (determined to bring about change). Cognition (deep understanding of social problems and causes, as well as potential solutions). Feasibility (a realistic opportunity to bring about change). Desirability (need for change to happen and confidence that others support change). Skills available (confidence can bring about change). Personal experience/confidence in bringing about change successfully (having seen injustice). Social networks (social circles for encouragement). Conducive environment (social, economic, political).	[36]
	Creating new positions, roles, influences, organisational freedoms, and power bases aligning with personal goals, interests, and values.	[37]
	Career opportunities and rewards.	[38]
	Spiritual leadership (vision, altruism, compassion, social responsibility).	[39]
	Relationships between social procurement field actors which motivate and enable the sharing of information and practices. Resources that provide finance, support, and the best practice guidance to enable inter-organisational learning.	[1]
	Create change at a systems level. Moral outrage against injustice. Opportunity to create community benefit/social value.	[20]
2: What is the nature of these evolving roles in construction companies?	Sell and protect ideas. Provide emotional and material support. Channel resources to a project. Enlisting and securing support. Motivating others to come onboard. Supply ideas, energy and determination. Different levels of champions working together.	[12,13,40]
	Form supporting intra- and inter-organisational cross-sector collaborations/relationships.	[41]
	Encourage, promote, and facilitate open discussion. Protect ideas from threat.	[19]
	Engage in extracurricular tasks (outside normal job description). Self-made adjustable roles which rely on operational, education and collaborative work. Engage in institutional work (to change existing norms and practices and legitimise new social procurement roles, relationships and authority in existing structures). Adopt rhetorical strategies to bring about change.	[8,10,11,34,42]
	Value-adding connector—adding social value along the interaction chain.	[32]
	Mesh people, processes technologies, cultures and systems. Leadership (visionary, political, ethical).	[30]
	Research—collect and present evidence to back-up arguments/case. Working outside existing rules and procedures, defined roles and lines of responsibility.	[31]
	Educate stakeholders.	[41]

Table 1. *Cont.*

Research Question	Factors	Key References
2: What is the nature of these evolving roles in construction companies?	Sensemaking, sense giving and sense breaking. Connecting actors in new ways. Influencing others through combinations of rhetorical, evidence-based and rational strategies. Unlearning (breaking existing logics and institutions). Bricolage (making do, combining existing resources and redefining roles in new ways).	[13]
	Creating new proto-institutions.	[8]
	Praxis (drive change through developing new practices, trial and error and experimentation, working in different, careers, fields and business units).	[28]
	Role changes over phases of the innovation process: Design for change; develop business case; internalise change; implement change; evaluate change. Knowledge stage; persuasion stage; decision-making; implementation; confirmation.	[43,44]
	Create and leverage new cross-sector partnerships between private, public and third sector organisations.	[33]

3. Methodology

Ontologically, given the collaborative, multi-field and relational underpinnings of organisational champion motivations and roles, this research was guided by a social constructivist lens and an interpretivist epistemology. Informed by reflective practitioner theory and the Aristotelian concept of praxis [23], it employed qualitative data collection and analyses to produce in-depth accounts of the day-to-day emerging roles, practices and experiences of social procurement champions working in the construction industry.

3.1. Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with social procurement champions from major contracting firms in the Australian construction industry. Semi-structured interviews allowed the research team to make sense of social procurement champions' multidimensional and evolving roles. As Blackstone [45] notes, in such contexts, data validity can be undermined by using methods such as surveys or highly structured interviews. This is because the standardised manner in which questions are posed in surveys makes it difficult for respondents to articulate the uncertainties and evolving experiences and lessons surrounding them. Furthermore, given the uncertain nature of the roles we were exploring, semi-structured interviews allowed respondents the freedom to express their views on their own terms and for researchers to engage in a two-way dialogue, following unexpected leads not anticipated in the original interview questions [46]. By allowing the co-production of narratives between interviewer and participants, semi-structured interviews provided the research team with deeply reflective stories about our champions' experiences in advocating for social procurement in their organisations.

Semi-structured interviews were also well-suited to the lack of clarity in many construction organisations regarding what social procurement is and who is responsible for it [11,46]. Using a survey approach to identify champions in this environment is also unreliable and problematic due to the high risk of a survey being sent to the wrong person or misunderstood [47]. Furthermore, since there are relatively few recognised social procurement champions in the Australian construction industry, the sample size for a survey would be too small for reliable statistical analysis. Finally, and crucially, given the potential for social desirability bias in this area [48], semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to probe respondents if they suspected they were saying what they perceived to be the 'right thing'.

Our sampling approach was purposeful and involved approaching tier-one contracting and consulting organisations in the Australian construction industry to nominate a champion of social procurement in their organisation. Tier-one firms are organisations that work on the largest construction projects (typically valued at over AUD 500 million)

and were chosen because social procurement is currently restricted to major public sector projects in Australia, which these firms tend to work on [33].

Following Molloy et al. [13], our sampling criteria were based on a literature-based description of a champion (as defined above) to help organisations nominate appropriate respondents irrespective of hierarchical level. Before any interview, each respondent was also asked to confirm their role as a champion of social procurement in their organisation. Additionally, following Molloy et al. [13], potential attributional bias was minimised by using neutral terminology (e.g., non-heroic) and ensuring the anonymity of all respondents in the analysis and research reporting process. Snowball sampling was employed to access an undefined and emerging community of social procurement practitioners by asking respondents to nominate who they considered champions in other qualifying tier-one organisations.

Interviews were conducted remotely over a two-month period (March–May 2020) using Zoom due to the face-to-face restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The semi-structured interview questions were deliberately open-ended to enable the respondents to describe their roles on their own terms without any preconceived answers from the researchers [49]. Interview questions included:

1. What is driving SP outside and within the business?
2. What is your main motivation in doing this job?
3. Can you describe your job in terms of SP and what you actually do?
4. How important are relationships to your job, and how much time do you spend nurturing and building them?
5. Is your SP role formally established and recognised within the business; where does it sit in the organisational structure and how has it evolved over time?
6. How do you persuade people to get onboard? What methods do you use to build support for SP in the business?
7. Who are the most important people to get onboard; why and how do you do that?
8. How do you build a community of support within the organisation and across organisations?

Employing the concept of 'theoretical saturation' [49], we continued interviewing respondents until the data collection process no longer offered any new or relevant insights in relation to the research questions and core analytical categories in Table 1. This rolling approach meant that data analysis and data collection had to occur in parallel. This process resulted in a total of fifteen interviews with champions from ten different tier-one contracting and consulting companies (Table 2), which typically lasted between one and two hours. To minimise researcher bias and maximise reflexivity [50], these interviews were conducted by two researchers (an 'insider' with experience of the construction industry and an 'outsider' without any experience of construction but an expert in social policy and public management). After each interview, the researchers met to debrief and compare notes around their interpretation of how respondents answered each question. These analytical memos became an important part of the data, and were analysed following the process described below.

3.2. Analysis

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis in five stages following the protocols of Guest et al. [51] and Gioia et al. [52].

Our research questions were our analytic starting point, and the first step involved researchers repeatedly reading the interview transcripts to obtain a high level of familiarity with the data. Second, researchers conducted open (inductive) and directed (deductive) interviews, coding, organising, and generating an initial list of items/codes (first-order coding) from the dataset that had a reoccurring pattern. The analytical framework in Table 1 was used for deductive coding. Third, researchers searched for recurring patterns, linkages, categories, and subcategories within the first-order codes relating to each research question. Fourth, researchers examined how codes combined to form over-reaching themes relating

to the research questions. In the fifth and final stage, emergent themes were further refined by continued searches for data that supported or refuted the initial themes, allowing for further expansion and connections between overlapping themes. This process continued in parallel with data collection until theoretical saturation occurred and no further themes emerged. Any instances of disagreement were resolved through discussion, a process which continued until 100% inter-rater agreement was achieved, providing a high level of 'fit' with the data and a confidence in the theoretical validity of the emergent themes.

This process was applied to all the interview transcripts and tabulated in Table 3, which shows some selected examples of interview quotations relating to each research question for illustrative purposes.

Table 2. Sample structure.

Respondent	Position	Gender	Organization Description
R1	Social Procurement Manager	Female	Major international construction and infrastructure contractor. Revenue: AUD 4.2 billion
R2	Social Inclusion Manager	Male	Major international construction and infrastructure contractor. Revenue: AUD 4.2 billion
R3	General Manager	Female	Major international building construction, infrastructure, investment and development company. Revenue USD 5.19 billion
R4	Head of Sustainability	Male	Major international building construction, infrastructure, investment and development company. Revenue USD 5.19 billion
R5	Technical Director Social Outcomes	Female	Major project management, engineering and consulting services firm operating in 150 countries. Revenue AUD 2.72 billion
R6	Social Programme Manager	Female	An international construction contractor which specialises in commercial high-rise buildings. AUD 3.78 billion
R7	Employee Relations Manager	Male	An international construction contractor which specialises in commercial high-rise buildings. Revenue AUD 3.78 billion
R8	Director, Communication and Stakeholder Engagement	Female	An engineering, management, design, planning, project management, consulting and advisory company Revenue AUD 1.06 billion
R9	Senior Project Manager	Male	Project management consultancy, project manages major projects, 22 employees operate across Australia
R10	Stakeholder Engagement Manager and Training Project Officer	Female	Multinational and publically listed construction, property and infrastructure company. Revenue AUD 11.1 billion
R11	Social Diversity Supply Chain Manager	Male	Multinational and publically listed construction, property and infrastructure company. Revenue AUD 11.1 billion
R12	People and Engagement Director	Male	International construction, tunnelling, rail, building and services provider Revenue: AUD 4.2 billion
R13	Workforce Development and Industry Participation Manager	Female	An international construction contractor which specialises in commercial high-rise buildings. Revenue AUD 3.78 billion
R14	Development and Services Manager	Female	Construction contractor specialising in Metro, Freight and Heavy Haul and Light Rail infrastructure. Revenue AUD 55.1 million
R15	Managing Director	Male	Major subcontractor specialising in electrical contracting

Table 3. Coding and thematic analysis process (examples).

Evidence	Codes	Analytic Categories	Emergent Themes
RQ1: What motivates people to become champions of social procurement?			
The demand is just simply going to outstrip the supply. So we've spent the last couple of years trying to– ... we'll teach you how to do it, we'll teach you how to be cost comparative and how to actually stand on your own two feet'. (R14) *It's sometimes just the basic ability to facilitate linkages into socially primed or mission based businesses or community organizations in a way that's respectful and mutually beneficial. (R5)*	Supply outstripping demand Teaching and supporting suppliers Ability to facilitate linkages Mutually beneficial Respectful	Third-sector capacity building [43] Social capital (bonding capital, bridging capital, linking capital) [53]	Third-sector capacity building
RQ2: What is the nature of these evolving roles in the construction industry?			
Is it the language we are using, is it the culturally appropriate practice that is informing our processes. (R5) *The language of a project director, of a site engineer, of a cost planner, how they price services and products. (R11)*	Language Culture Profession Supportive Appropriate	Field of collaborative practices and the enabling role of micro process such as language [54]	Developing culturally appropriate workforces, narratives, languages and practices

Following good qualitative research practice, and to minimise any researcher bias, the above process was undertaken by a team of researchers from social sciences, public administration, and construction backgrounds to provide different perspectives on the data. This insider/outsider approach is widely used in psychology and social sciences research to provide different perspectives on data [50]. Comparing and cross-checking codes, categories, and themes between the research team further helped our positionality and reflexivity and minimised any potential disciplinary bias in our results.

Following Hennink [55], results are presented below in simultaneous analysis and interpretation to facilitate deeper reflection on the research findings and help manage researcher positionality to minimise potential subjectivity in the interpretation of results. In line with the traditions of thematic research, the results are supported by selected quotes that, through the coding process, were related to the emergent themes under each research question. Given the limits of the literature on innovation champions, especially in a construction social procurement context, the results below draw on 'laterally relevant' literature from other relevant fields to develop the discussion introducing new avenues of multidisciplinary research and theory, which can be used to enrich the nascent, empirical and theoretical foundations of social procurement in the field of construction.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Question One: What Motivates People to Become Champions of Social Procurement in Construction Companies?

When asked about their main motivation in championing social procurement within their organisations, our data yielded four main themes which could be broadly clustered under the following headings: opportunity to make a difference; opportunity to leverage the power of business to make change; supporting third sector capacity building in the sector, and political motives. Each of these categories is explored below.

4.1.1. Opportunity to Make a Difference

In responding to this question, all respondents articulated a strong desire to 'make a difference' to the community and change negative stereotypes regarding the disadvantaged people that social procurement policies were designed to help. This finding supports Lewis and Cassell's [21] references to altruism in Table 1 and provides further empirical evidence to support the benevolent attributes and 'idealist norms' that Loosemore and Higgon [20] and Troje and Gluch [34] attribute to social procurement actors that they interviewed in the construction industry:

> *I don't think the fame and the fortune are necessarily going to come. But I do think being able to play some role in making a difference to the lives of a lot of people who find it a little bit hard that's probably the most important thing* (R7)

> *I am fortunate enough to now be in a position that I can challenge people's preconceived ideas of what somebody who needs a handout looks like. It's a personal thing* (R14).

Adding to Table 1 and reflecting insights from wider cognitive career theory that highlights the importance of 'calling' and 'self-efficacy' in career choice decisions [29], our findings indicated that this sense of altruism was often based on personal exposure to disadvantages and involvement in social activism in their previous lives [17].

> *I come from a bit of a working-class background and have been exposed to a few things growing up that sort of motivates me personally.* (R2)

> *I've always had a strong appetite and active participation in social justice issues.* (R5)

4.1.2. Opportunity to Leverage the Power of Business to Cause Change

The findings also contribute new insights into career pathways into social procurement. The data showed that respondents achieved their roles through a diverse range of pathways that were mostly not associated with construction. These backgrounds included involvement in social enterprises, not-for-profits, government, charities, social purpose intermediaries or unions. Reflecting the references in Table 1, which refer to opportunities to bring about change and develop new career opportunities by leveraging their unique relationships to offer new solutions [1,36], most respondents recounted their frustrations of lacking the influence and resources to affect systemic change in their previous professional lives. All were attracted to social procurement by the opportunity to leverage the power of business to solve social problems in new and innovative ways:

> *Mission-based businesses were still not at the main table, here there's the right resourcing, there's the right opportunity for market share.* (R5)

> *Improving the system. I mean part and parcel of that delivery is actually coming up with a better way to do things* (R7)

Notably, in contrast to Loosemore and Higgon [20], as shown in Table 1, only one respondent aspired to create change at a wider systems level, based on an in-depth analysis of the systemic causes of social problems such as unemployment. Therefore, while some champions recognised that the industry needed to change, most champions were quite conservative in their ambitions and were mostly limited to bringing about change at an organisational level.

However, adding to Table 1, our findings also support Troje and Gluch's [10] and Allen's [56] insights into the 'pragmatic problem-solving' aspects of social procurement roles. While respondents all aspired to see social procurement given the same legitimacy as other key project roles, they were also realistic about the challenges they faced in normalising their practices. Interestingly, many considered that their non-construction backgrounds compromised their ability to bring about change because they were often seen as an 'outsider' to the industry. Highlighting the importance of 'social identity' to the acting-out of social procurement roles, these findings support Phua's [57] proposition that individuals define their self-concepts through the organisations with which they identify,

and that these identity-based forces are the basis for the development of co-operative behaviour.

Respondents expressed various frustrations in 'normalising social procurement' especially at a project level. These included: the relative lack of priority given to social issues in construction [58]; the need to resolve competing institutional logics and goals [8,59]; and the difficulties in measuring and reporting the impact of their work in a relevant way [46]. Reflecting Grob and Benn's [60] early institutional analysis of how sustainability became imbedded into other industries, all respondents noted the importance of external regulatory and contractual requirements as a coercive force to normalise social procurement in their organisations and supply chains. Therefore, this history may offer relevant insights into how social procurement could be normalised in the construction industry:

> *It's hard for people to think about social value when they have to deliver projects under incredibly demanding time and cost constraints social value is just another distraction.* (R7)

The findings also added an interesting, gendered dimension to Kruse et al's [36] notion of conducive environments for social change in Table 1. Several female respondents agreed that gender equality advances the industry and offers new opportunities to make a difference through these new social procurement roles:

> *I took a step out of construction because I just got really disillusioned about the industry, that it was just rough, it was brutal, and lots of men and just the same. I saw that there was some change happening in this space.* (R2)

4.1.3. Supporting Third-Sector Capacity Buildings in the Third Sector

Adding to the literature in Table 1, many respondents were motivated by the prospect of supporting third-sector capacity buildings in this area. Reflecting the immaturity of the third construction sector [43], most respondents raised concerns about the inability of social enterprises and indigenous businesses (the primary focus of social procurement in Australia) to grasp the opportunities afforded by these new policies. Once again, raising the insider/outsider argument respondents described the misunderstanding of these organisations in the industry and the negative perceptions of their ability to compete for work against industry incumbents. Given the centrality of these organisations to social procurement goals [46], these findings raise critical questions for researchers, policy makers and practitioners regarding how the industry best supports third-sector capacity building to ensure the sustainability of social procurement requirements:

> *The demand is just simply going to outstrip the supply. So we've spent the last couple of years trying to build capacity in social enterprises and Indigenous businesses. We'll teach you how to do it, we'll teach you how to be cost comparative and how to actually stand on your own two feet.* (R14)

The findings also indicate that social procurement champions retain strong relational ties and loyalties in their previous professional lives. Although this is referenced in Table 1 [1], it was also found that their ability to coordinate these background relationships strategically shaped the approach each respondent took to implementing social procurement in their organisations. The link between a respondent's professional background, their coordinating potential and the approach they take to social procurement provide new insights into the drivers of social innovation in this area. This also adds new insights to the nature of cross-sector collaboration [54,61] which underpins social procurement in construction by suggesting that this is likely to be driven from a particular perspective linked to a champion's professional background. In particular, drawing on the recent work of Kyne and Aldrich [53], the roles of bonding capital (the relationships a person has with friends); bridging capital (the ability to connect people); and linking capital (the relationship between a person and formal leaders) appear to be especially important. Our findings, therefore, indicate that, if social procurement continues to become an increasing source of competitive advantage in construction, as Raiden et al. [46] predict, the choice of

social procurement champion will be critical in a firms' differentiation strategy and should be considered very carefully:

> It's sometimes just the basic ability to facilitate linkages into socially primed or mission based businesses or community organizations in a way that's respectful and mutually beneficial. (R5)

> In its simplest sense, social procurement is a form of organizing. (R7)

4.1.4. Political Motives

Prior research has highlighted the political underpinnings of social procurement [2] and questioned its political neutrality [62]. However, adding to the literature in Table 1, only one respondent identified their politics as a motive for implementing social procurement. Instead, reflecting Troje and Gluch's [10] references to pragmatism in social procurement roles, social procurement was generally portrayed as a politically sterile, uncritical, and instrumental mechanism to bring about social change:

> I was going to say my motivation is not political, but it is political, I suppose. Yeah if you come to the nub of it my motivation really is quite political, part of my motivation is to respond to the fragmentation that I know is being created deliberately. (R7)

Indeed, the politicisation of social procurement was portrayed by most respondents as risky and potentially counterproductive to their goals. This reflects De Pieri and Teasdale's [62] recent findings regarding people's tendency to ignore the underlying political motives, which inevitably underpin social policy innovations such as social procurement. It also perhaps partially explains the lack of wider ambition to bring about wider systematic change outside the confines of their organisations. As Loosemore and Phua [63] note, the construction industry's relationship with corporate social responsibility is complex, multidimensional and characterised by conflicting institutional logics. To those at project level, the politics of social procurement are largely irrelevant in delivering a project within tight budget and time constraints:

> The minute we're seen as the expert or the lefty or the social justice person we don't have clout in the business anymore (R5).

4.2. Research Question Two: What Is the Nature of These Evolving Roles in Construction Companies?

When asked to describe their job in terms of social procurement, our data yielded eight main themes, which can be broadly clustered under the following headings: inspiring people; cross-functional working and linking to communities; developing culturally appropriate workforces, narratives, languages, and practices; challenging institutions and existing incumbent relationships; changing perceptions of value; managing risk; learning, educating, experimenting and innovating; and building trusting relationships. Each of these is explored below.

4.2.1. Inspiring People

Reflecting Schon's [14] portrayal of champions as heroic, inspirational and transformational leaders, most respondents agreed that, in the absence of clearly defined roles, organisational legitimacy and formal power, as well as in the face of significant institutional resistance, there was a large motivational and inspirational element to their job. Adding to Table 1 and Troje's [34] references to 'emotional work' (pathos-based strategies), respondents relied heavily on their personal commitment, determination and passion for change, as well as the power of stories to emotionally engage others in the need for change. However, reflecting the enterprise culture of construction [64] Troje and Gluch's [11] references to pragmatism, respondents universally agreed that this must be coupled with concrete examples and a practical demonstration of what was achievable in practice:

> It's about inspiring people a lot of inspirational thought leadership, giving some really fun examples. (R5)

> *We engaged the hearts of these crusty hardnosed commercially driven supervisors and engineers, that whilst they might not be getting the cheapest subcontract out of a social enterprise they were transforming lives.* (R2)

4.2.2. Cross-Functional Working and Linking to Communities

Adding to Woolcott et al.'s [32] notion of value-adding connectors, respondents also articulated the importance of working across organisational boundaries within their organisations at operational, tactical, and strategic levels. Project management, human resources, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, procurement and bidding were generally identified as key internal stakeholders in promoting social procurement. The results indicate that social procurement is not just about external inter-organisational cross-sector collaboration [1,33] but also requires internal intra-organisational collaboration. As Murphy and Eddie [6] noted, social procurement is challenging because it creates new connections between organisational functions in construction organisations that are traditionally disconnected:

> *I worked with our HR and our diversity inclusion team to come up with some innovative responses that could meet the government requirements* (R8).

> *How you can get sometimes quick tactical wins, but also how do you embed strategic planning into supply chain for long term enduring outcomes with community, it's informing our bids or proposals.* (R5)

4.2.3. Developing Culturally Appropriate Workforces, Narratives, Languages and Practices

Research in the field of collaborative practice highlights the important enabling role of language in allowing collaboration to occur and be sustained [42]. Reflecting this, several respondents noted that their roles also involved developing appropriate "narratives" and "culturally appropriate practices", which could connect them to the various stakeholders that they worked with. Once again, findings indicated that organisational story-telling played an especially powerful role in developing these narratives:

> *So if you can create a narrative where you are slowly but surely educating those people around you and providing opportunities for them to actually engage in that narrative, you're creating other champions* (R5).

> *Sharing stories is critical* (R2)

4.2.4. Challenging Institutions and Existing Incumbent Relationships

Reflecting upon Table 1, and particularly the work of Troje [42], respondents described a very traditional industry with strong institutional norms, practices, and notions of value that needed to be challenged. Adding a new industrial relations dimension to this research, surprisingly, construction unions were widely described as a major institutional barrier to implementation. Although we did not interview unions to explore this finding further, respondents argued that unions opposed these policies because the people targeted were typically non-union members and employed on contracts outside of union-negotiated enterprise agreements. Our findings therefore are not in alignment with research which argues that unions help 'all' workers [65] and raise questions for union leaders about their apparent representation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups in society:

> *It's a high risk environment, they don't want to do anything that's going to potentially pose risks, particularly with unions.* (R2)

4.2.5. Changing Perceptions of Value

Adding to emerging debates regarding the need to widen traditional concepts of 'value' in construction [66] and institutional logics and norms in construction [8,59], respondents widely articulated the need to challenge deeply rooted norms around concepts of value and to widen narrow, professionally bounded perceptions of the construction industry's raison d'être. For the respondents, bringing about change involved moving other organisational

actors beyond the measurable economic benefits of social procurement to understanding and participating in improving the lives of others through their decision-making agency and personal experience of contributing to the change:

> *Engineers and builders see construction as a technical exercise and rarely if ever ask what buildings are for social procurement is about recognising that buildings are ultimately tools for social change. This is huge change in thinking for procurement professionals who generally are taught to think in one dimension and seek the lowest price.* (R3)

> *Processes around redefining what value is they won't compromise you also need to be realistic around what that cost is, be articulate in telling someone like [company name] this is the cost and this is why it costs, and the outcomes.* (R11)

4.2.6. Managing Risk

Risk management was a recurring theme in the data, although it is largely missing from the extant literature in Table 1. This supports Loosemore et al's [33] research, which shows that social procurement is perceived to be a significant risk to budgets, programs, quality and safety in the construction industry. The risk of delivering social procurement targets was routinely transferred down the contractual chain to subcontractors, raising new questions about their willingness and capacity to deliver. As Loosemore et al. [33] note, it is also where the most significant resistance to change exists:

> *In my head it's all around risk mitigation. So if I have an engineer saying we don't need to procure from Aboriginal businesses or we don't need that person onsite, I'm already thinking about what are their perceived risks, and how can I sell it to them in a way that I'm already solving their problem so that's giving them an opportunity.* (R14)

> *Cost, cost is super important, there needs to be acceptance, endorsement, and a level of confidence and comfort that the team that they're going to be introducing on this project is going to execute it and design and deliver.* (R4)

4.2.7. Learning, Educating, Experimenting and Innovating

All respondents highlighted a significant cognitive and educational component to their roles (in both their organisations and supply chains). This reflects Molloy et al.'s [13] references to 'sensemaking' and Troje and Gluch's [10] references to 'educational work' (Table 1). However, adding to this, respondents concurred that any education needed to be experiential rather than abstract. In line with Kolb's [67] experiential learning model, which shows that this requires both 'concrete experience' and 'abstract conceptualization', respondents noted the critical role of demonstration projects to illustrate the practical feasibility and value of implementing social procurement in their organisations:

> *It's about education, it's about us–without wanting to sound arrogant, it's about us educating our subcontractors as to the potential.* (R7)

> *It's about constantly educating those around you and providing opportunity for those around you to learn and experience. Because I think this is very experiential if never actually experienced it it's very hard to understand or walk in somebody else's shoes.* (R6)

4.2.8. Building Trust and Relationships

Relationship and trust building for mutual gain were universally described as critical to social procurement implementation and the importance of Woolcott et al's [32] concept of 'value-adding connectors' referenced in Table 1 was evident in our results:

> *To make sure that we have infrastructure and the connections that enable us to–I suppose ultimately to outperform. I mean if you spend a lot of time joining the dots, you start to understand just what benefits can be derived by putting people in touch with each other.* (R7)

While the use of demonstration projects was central to building trust through credibility in delivering on project targets, respondents described the challenges of building trust

in a project-based context where both internal and external stakeholders are constantly changing. This required large amounts of time to be invested in building and then re-building relationships, often outside formal work hours. Interestingly, while this raises new questions about the work–life balance of social procurement champions, most saw their roles as a cause rather than a job and considered it a worthwhile investment in developing this new field of practice:

> *You take time, you take a lot of time, you can't build a relationship in a minute, it does take time, and it gets back to all of those things about being genuine, about your transparency, about those levels of trust.* (R6)

> *I mean my phone's always on, I never turn my phone off and there are drawbacks to that I know.* (R7).

5. Conclusions

This research was set within the emerging context of social procurement in construction. In addressing the general lack of theory and empirical research in this area, the aim was to contribute to the nascent research on the organisational professional who are shaping this new field of practice. Specifically, by mobilising the long tradition of research into organisational champions in the broader field of organisation studies, the motives driving these professionals and the nature of their evolving roles were explored. Mobilizing the theoretical perspectives offered by organisational champion research in Table 1 has helped to contribute numerous new conceptual and practical insights into the function of social procurement champions in the Australian construction industry for researchers, policy makers and practitioners working in this emerging field.

Concerning research question one, our findings indicate that the champions on which the success of social procurement depends come from a wide range of professional backgrounds and bring a variety of new social capital to the construction industry which can enhance the social value it creates. Strategically, as companies innovate to gain a competitive advantage in this increasingly important area of construction performance, these relationships are critical in differentiating an organisation's approach to social procurement. It is found that these people are linked by a shared sense of altruism often rooted in personal exposure to disadvantages and social activism. Typically frustrated by their previous experiences of working in the third-sector to bring about meaningful social change, these champions put aside political judgements and ideologies and see the potential power of leveraging construction procurement to make a difference to the communities in which the industry builds. This is not easy and they achieve this by challenging institutional norms, practices and supply chains relationships, and traditional discourses around value and competitiveness in an increasingly socially conscious business environment.

For research question two, the results highlight a significant inspirational, emotive and educational element to these new roles. However, in the long-term, the results indicate that sustainable changes in industry norms and practices will depend on evidence-based demonstrations of what is possible at a project level within the constraints of other project objectives. This involves de-risking social procurement and changing deeply protected and entrenched procurement and recruitment practices, supply chain relationships and biases and stereotypes about the 'ideal' type of person and supplier working in the construction industry. This requires a strong focus on experiential learning, educating, experimenting, innovating and developing new cross-disciplinary narratives (and language) around the importance of social value. The findings show that this requires enormous investments of time and energy, often outside formal day-to-day roles. It also depends on the development of new relational and collaborative capital, knowledge and competencies to build the trusting inter-organisational and intra-organisational relationships, on which the successful implementation of social procurement depends.

The implications for practice point to the importance of providing champions with the freedom and flexibility to build their evolving social procurement roles. It also highlights the need for organisations to support their social procurement champions in challeng-

ing deeply embedded institutional norms and practices, which currently portray social procurement as a threat to effective project delivery. Education and training are key to changing these norms and practices, as is the use of demonstration projects to illustrate the impact that these policies can have. It is clear that incremental, rather than radical, innovation is most likely to succeed, and that organisations must support their champions by adequately resourcing and legitimizing their roles with a clear identity and position within an organisational structure. Developing methodologies to measure social impact to provide an evidential basis for change is also crucial.

While these results provide important, new, conceptual and practical insights to inform social procurement research, as well as practice and policy in construction, the limitation of the findings reported is the Australian-centric, exploratory and qualitative nature of the research. Although the sample size is well within the norms of qualitative research and was determined by the concepts of theoretical saturation in analysis, more research is needed to cross-validate our results. In particular, given that the sample was mainly focused on head-office-type roles and external consultants, more research is needed into how social procurement champions operate at a project level and in client organisations (public and private). This is important because the literature indicates that a variety of types of champions are needed to implement innovations into organisations. It is important to understand the different types of champions that are needed to implement these policies. Further research is also required in different international social procurement policy contexts. As noted above, social procurement policies are emerging in many countries and will inevitably differ in the scope, focus and degree to which they mandate social value outputs. The extent to which this influences the practices of social procurement champions in advancing this field of practice needs to be explored. Other important avenues of research which emerge from these findings include: the role of gender in influencing change in such a highly masculinised industry; the emotional dimensions of social procurement roles; and the role of social capital, linking capital and relational capital in facilitating cross-sector collaboration. The findings also highlight the potential value of theories of social capital, social networks, new institutionalism and cross-sector collaboration as new conceptual lenses to understand these issues. In particular, the use of social network analysis offers the potential for new quantitative insights into the types of social structures and social capital (bonding, bridging, linking), which best facilitate the inter and intra-organisational collaborations which appear to be so central to champion roles.

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