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Background

Mette Søgård Nielsen (born 1984) is a researcher within the field of entrepreneurship. Her research and teaching especially concerns the start-up of new companies with special emphasis on how entrepreneurs' social networks provide access to the resources needed in the entrepreneurial process, both in terms of instrumental resources, but very much also more intangible resources such as emotional support. Her dissertation incorporates social-psychological explanations into the field of entrepreneurs' social networks.

Mette obtained her MSc in Business, Language and Culture with a specific focus on International Relations from the University of Southern Denmark in 2009, and her PhD degree in 2014 from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Southern Denmark. Before initiating her PhD studies, Mette worked at IDEA with a special focus on promoting and facilitating entrepreneurship among university students.

Department of Entrepreneurship and Relationship Management

The Department of Entrepreneurship and Relationship Management is located at the University of Southern Denmark, campus Kolding, and employs approximately 85 people. This location is central to the growth centres within the Triangle Region and offers a unique opportunity to close cooperation with the companies and public authorities in the region in respect to research and educational projects.

For several years the research of the department has been based on learning networks with companies and trade promotion institutions. In addition to this, the department has a long tradition of problembased cooperation across traditional business research areas and very often by means of external funding. The research of the department concentrates on two key areas: entrepreneurship and relationship management and originates from traditional research areas such as marketing, applied economics, accounting, operation management and organization.

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PHD DISSERTATION OF
METTE SØGAARD NIELSEN

AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AND RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

**'GIVE AND GAIN – HOW, WHY AND WHEN
PEOPLE PROVIDE SUPPORT
TO ENTREPRENEURS'**

10 OCTOBER 2014



Give and Gain – How, Why and When People Provide Support to Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs' social networks have intrigued researchers for several years and have been the focus of many studies within entrepreneurship research. Based on the assumption that entrepreneurs are in need of resources to initiate and progress through the entrepreneurial process, many different aspects of entrepreneurs' social networks have been scrutinized. Common to many of these studies, is a conviction that social networks are drivers for entrepreneurial success, although it has been difficult to establish empirical support for this conviction within the field (Witt, 2004). My dissertation takes a critical view of current research into entrepreneurs' social networks and identifies two gaps that can increase our knowledge about social networks within the field of entrepreneurship.

The first gap is referred to as the *structure-content* gap. Within traditional studies of social networks in entrepreneurship, a structural perspective is usually applied, where network benefits are explained by how entrepreneurs are positioned within the social structure of the network. Although valid, this perspective lacks focus on *what* is actually exchanged in a social network. By considering social support theory within an entrepreneurship context, my dissertation focuses on the actual content of the exchange, as well as on how this content is exchanged.

The second gap is referred to as the *ego-alter* gap. Previous studies have often explained differences in the support that entrepreneurs receive by deficiencies in personal characteristics, network structure or the abilities of the individual entrepreneur. This implies the assumption that those providing support to entrepreneurs are a homogenous group of individuals with similar characteristics, network structures and abilities. This dissertation shifts the focus from support recipients to support providers by arguing and demonstrating that support providers also differ in their abilities and motivations for providing support. Therefore, social support is, in this dissertation, treated not only a consequence of differences between entrepreneurs, but also a function of differences between those actually providing support.

Based on these two gaps, the research question posed in my dissertation is:

How, why and when do individuals provide social support to nascent entrepreneurs?

The research question is answered through quantitative analyses, and builds on data from the Danish Alter Study on Entrepreneurship (DASE). The three papers comprising the dissertation are all built on hypotheses, which are subsequently tested using logistic and linear regression analysis.

Through three distinct papers, the dissertation contributes with different perspectives on the *how, why and when* asked in the research question. Together they provide a comprehensive and coherent understanding of social support provision. The three different contributions are:

How: Providing social support is a dynamic act, which becomes particularly obvious when the focus shifts from structure and relations to actual content. By studying content, this dissertation illustrates dynamics between levels of support as well as between support types.

Why: My dissertation shows that providing social support to nascent entrepreneurs is not just a reaction to a need for support by the entrepreneur, but is also driven by self-oriented motivations and different expectations attached to the role-positions that individuals have in relation to each other. These findings underline the importance of addressing the ego-alter gap, because they demonstrate how individuals provide different kinds of support in different ways depending on personal motivations - an insight that is overlooked, when researchers choose to focus primarily on support recipients.

When: The ways in which social support is provided and the reasons for this are not universal. The findings demonstrate that social support is contingent upon how well support providers and nascent entrepreneurs know each other.

My dissertation demonstrates that social support provision is much more than a case of one individual helping another. Social support provision becomes multifaceted, when it is not just a consequence of a specific need from a nascent entrepreneur, but is also related to self-oriented motivations and expectations of those providing support. Both support providers and nascent entrepreneurs gain from the support and these findings underline how we as individuals are embedded in social relationships that guide much of our behavior.

Mette Sjøgaard Nielsen

