

# The Creation of an Unsolicited Organization: Victim Support Sweden

Kerstin Svensson<sup>1</sup>  · Carina Gallo<sup>1,2</sup>

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**Abstract** The aim of this study is to understand how a new nationwide nonprofit organization, Victim Support Sweden (VSS), emerged in just a few years without public or political demand. In this qualitative study, we reconstruct and follow the first years of the organization. The study is based on a content analysis of VSS’s archival documents from 1988 to 1992 and retrospective interviews with key persons. The results acknowledge the power of entrepreneurs in establishing the organization. The entrepreneurs used their skills, engagement, and backgrounds to “make sense” of the organization, even though there were no crime victims calling for support. They combined logics from adjacent fields and created a specific new “victim support logic.” Thereafter, the logic spread quickly through the entrepreneurs’ lobbying of politicians and education of local victim support volunteers.

**Keywords** Entrepreneurs · Cognitive maps · Organizational logic · Victim support

## Introduction

In the welfare state era up until the 1970s in Sweden, support for victims of crime was not considered an issue. Crime was considered a social problem resulting from

inequalities and poverty and with consequences for society. Crime was not regarded as a problem for the individual, the offender, or the victim. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, nonprofit victim support organizations were established throughout the country. At the same time, crime victimization attracted strong political interest. Victim support organizations rapidly emerged to solve problems that until that point had not been defined as public issues. How could these organizations become successful so quickly?

New organizations often struggle to gain a foothold in the fields in which they want to operate. To achieve this, they have to adhere to the institutional logics in their fields so that they can compete for resources. DiMaggio (1988) argues that “new institutions arise when organized actors with sufficient resources see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly” (p. 14). Actors can create a new meaning or system of understanding when they combine disparate sets of institutions to create something new (Garud et al. 2007).

Furthermore, organizations are dependent on their context in a way that promotes external control of the organization. When organizations need and compete for the same resources, the external control is enhanced as a way to strengthen predictability in an uncertain situation (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Within an organizational field, organizations are hence interdependent and control each other, as they are all dependent on their context. This also allows them to develop in similar ways and to create similar logics (Meyer and Scott 1992; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). How, then, can a new organization develop, gain resources, and establish a new field? What kind of logic can the organization use to create the field and find a place? And what role do institutional entrepreneurs play?

✉ Kerstin Svensson  
kerstin.svensson@soch.lu.se

<sup>1</sup> School of Social Work, Lund University, P.O. Box 23, 221 00 Lund, Sweden

<sup>2</sup> School of Public Affairs and Civic Engagement, San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94132, USA

In this study, we focus on the largest nonprofit victim support organization in Sweden, Victim Support Sweden (hereinafter abbreviated VSS), which grew rapidly during the late 1980s and early 1990s. A few, but active, entrepreneurs created the demand for the organization's practice. One could even say that VSS was established before the demand existed, as there was no public demand for victim support until the organization started its work. As a new nonprofit organization working for a new issue, there was no established organizational field and therefore no institutionalized logic.

The aim of this study is to understand how it was possible to establish a new nationwide nonprofit organization in just a few years in the absence of any public or political demand. In an effort to understand the emergence of VSS, we follow the footsteps of the entrepreneurs and reconstruct the organization's first years. Before unpacking the details of this development, we will set the scene by presenting perspectives on organizational agency, the context in which VSS was established, and the methods and material of the study.

## Organizations and Actors

Studies of organizations, especially neo-institutionalist studies, place little emphasis on individual actors. Beckert (1999) notes that if we assume that agents can make a difference, we have a weakness in institutional theory. Fligstein (1997) argues for a theory of institutional entrepreneurship. He proposes that actions are the outcomes of the social skills institutional entrepreneurs possess. Those skills translate into institutional arrangements that produce organizational fields. This concept includes the idea that some actors are better at producing social outcomes than others (DiMaggio 1988). Fligstein (1997) regards social skills as “the ability to relate to the situation of the ‘other’” (p. 398). In this case, institutional entrepreneurs need knowledge about the current situation in the organizational field, including the positions of the actors in the field. In addition, they need knowledge about which kinds of actions make sense within the field and context. In their endeavors, entrepreneurs must work both for internal cohesion within the organization and for the legitimization of the organization in its context. Battilana (2006) argues that institutional entrepreneurs need to have both a willingness to change and the ability to do so. They need a strong interest and a social position that provides legitimacy and enables agency. This position can be either formal or informal. Moreover, they should have inter-organizational mobility. Moving between organizations implies a wider exposure to different organizational

contexts, which in turn helps when moving beyond what is taken for granted.

To understand an organization, Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) state that one must grasp its context or ecology. One must also understand the organization's internal logic and how it is upheld, which Weick (2001) calls “sense-making” or a “cognitive map.” The idea of the organization is essential for both upholding it and making it part of the organizational landscape. These cognitive maps generate meaning for novel situations, reorganize concepts, and determine what a person will do in a situation. Therefore, the map *is* the organization, as it “contains the structure, the process, and the raw material from which agreements and conflicts are built when people coordinate action” (Weick 2001, p. 328). Weick (2001) argues that a cause map is a structure that holds the organization together. Weick also uses the concept of “presumption of logics,” which is similar to a self-fulfilling prophecy. This concept implies that there do not have to be facts to cover ideas in logics; it is sufficient that there be a general belief in an idea. In other words, it is enough that there is support for the idea that victims need assistance from volunteers—it does not need to be proved or questioned. This concept is very useful for understanding the development of VSS, as it relates to the situation where “[p]eople do not actually see causes and effects; they infer them” (Weick 2001, p. 392).

We must hence understand the process of establishing VSS through the entrepreneurs' agency. We can get to know the organization's context through the actions taken and agreements made by the entrepreneurs. We do this by tracing the entrepreneurs' path through the archival documents in combination with the retrospective interviews. To understand the rapidly growing interest in victims in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Sweden, we must first, however, examine the global and local context in which VSS was established.

## The Global and Local Contexts of Victim Support

In the postwar period, a welfare state philosophy guided state policy in Northern and Central Europe. Crime victimization was not a major social or political concern. Van Dijk (1988) writes about three waves in the ideological development of the victim movement, starting in the 1960s. In *the first wave*, victim compensation schemes were formed, first in New Zealand in 1963, followed by England in 1964, and the USA (California) in 1965. In *the second wave*, around the mid-1970s, the first general victim assistance schemes were established in Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, and the USA. In *the third wave*, during the 1980s, victim support organizations became

institutionalized and raised calls for justice. In the early 1980s, many victim assistance schemes were gradually co-opted by local and central governments. New forms of demands on the state also appeared, such as new consumer demands on the criminal justice system that were reflected in the Council of Europe and the United Nations statements related to victims of crime in 1985.

In the 1980s, van Dijk (1988) highlighted that the Scandinavian countries had been somewhat reluctant to supplement the existing welfare and health institutions with special services for victims. None of the Scandinavian countries had, as he pointed out, “been bitten by the victimagogic bug” (p. 125). The solution to victims’ problems up to that point had been sought in an extension of general welfare provisions where opportunities arose for nonprofit organizations.

In Sweden, crime rates had increased since the 1940s parallel to the development of a strong welfare state and good living conditions for the majority of the population. Crime was regarded as a social problem, and hence, the solution was to decrease inequalities and poverty through comprehensive and inclusive welfare policies (Gallo and Kim 2016). On an individual level, rehabilitation of offenders was the ideal, and the offender’s recidivism risk was an important part of sentencing.

Internationally, interest in victims had started to grow at a time when society was understood as a risk society. In Sweden, however, risks were related to aspects other than crime, traffic being one example (Österberg 2002). At the end of the 1970s, the women’s movement opened up the field of victim support and put crime and victimization on the political agenda, focusing, however, solely on violence against women. In the late 1980s, crime and victimization started to become established on the political agenda. Crime policies shifted away from rehabilitation and prevention of crime, and in 1989, “just deserts” became a leading principle in the Swedish Penal Code (Tham 1995).

In the 1980s, the organizational landscape in the field of social support was still mainly based on public administration and governmental organizations at national, regional, and local levels. However, many nonprofit organizations began to form. The idea of organized psychosocial support also started to develop. New support groups took form, for example, groups for people in crisis connected to specific incidents such as accidents and disasters. Toward the end of the decade, the National Board of Health and Welfare published guidelines for how psychological, psychiatric, and social support should be arranged after major accidents and catastrophes had affected the community (Nieminen Kristofersson 2002). The universal principles of the Swedish welfare state also changed, with an increase in the proportion of people relying on means-

tested relief rather than right-based welfare (Sunesson et al. 1998).

In sum, in the 1980s, Swedish crime and welfare policies started to shift away from principles of universalism, prevention, and treatment. Parallel nonprofit and non-governmental organizations became accepted, and private companies gradually entered the field of welfare provision. There was also a general awareness of the possibility of providing and organizing actions for psychosocial support for abused women and for people affected by crises. Victims of crime were at this time increasingly recognized internationally. By the late 1980s, crime victims as a group in need of support had become a truth that no one opposed in Sweden. Taken together, this created the framework in which new organizations could be established, even if there was no explicit demand for the service they offered. Before VSS was formed, support for crime victims was not on the political agenda, except for victim compensation and violence against women. No legislation, political debates, or government proposals addressing general victim support can be traced to the time before VSS was created.

## Methodology

This article is part of a larger research project examining the history of Victim Support Sweden, funded by The Crime Victim Fund. VSS provided us with full access to its national archive, which is an extensive collection of documents such as letters, annual reports, informational and educational material, member magazine articles, and minutes from board meetings and working groups. In the first phase of the study, we scanned, digitized, organized, and systemized the archival material. We sorted all the documents into a digital archive based on the type of document and in chronological order.

We analyzed the material through a qualitative content analysis. We focused on material from the organization’s first years, 1988–1992. Approximately 150 documents were available from this period. For the reconstruction, we systematically organized the documents according to date, author, form, subject, and content. We paid extra attention to letters in the analysis, as they used particularly vivid and less formalized language than other archival materials, such as board meeting minutes.

In addition to the archived material, we conducted two retrospective interviews with key persons in VSS, Björn Lagerbäck and Eva Larsson. Lagerbäck was one of the entrepreneurs who created the organization, and he held the position of chair of the national board between 1991 and 1994. Lagerbäck worked as a psychologist in the Prison and Probation Service from 1976 to 1985 and thereafter at an insurance company, Skandia, from 1985 to 2002.

Larsson worked for an educational association in close collaboration with VSS beginning in 1989. Later, she became employed by VSS and has held the position as secretary general since 2001. Per Svensson, the other entrepreneur who established the organization, passed away in 2000. Svensson was chair of the national board from 1988 to 1990 and was secretary general from 1991 to 2000. Svensson was a local policeman in Södertälje, a city south of Stockholm. Information on behalf of Svensson comes from either Lagerbäck or Larsson. Larsson worked closely with Svensson first as a partner from the educational association and then as a VSS employee. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and statements from Björn Lagerbäck and Eva Larsson will be quoted from these interviews and referred to as (BL) and (EL).

We carried out the analysis of the documents and interviews using archeological and genealogical methods as described by Foucault (1989). The archeological approach aims to reveal the material from each “layer,” i.e., each specific time, while the genealogy method aims to find the relationships between the materials over time. The archival material and the stories recounted in the interviews complement each other in the reconstruction of the process. We only used information that was confirmed by other parts of the material or the interviews.

The analysis examines a limited time period. We examine VSS’s formation and relationship with governmental bodies and other organizations over just a few years. By putting the documents in chronological order and focusing on who they address and what they concern, we can reconstruct VSS’s development. Limited by what the archives permit, we cannot address VSS’s full development. Furthermore, we focused on what VSS writes and says it did and less on its motives, even though the motives may be briefly mentioned in some cases.

### **How the Entrepreneurs Got Started: A Brief Background**

Shelters and support groups for abused women have existed in Sweden since the late 1970s. Lagerbäck was the pioneer behind Sweden’s first victim support center, which opened in 1980 in Malmö. The Malmö center did not become a permanent operation; it ended soon after it was founded due to a lack of interest in the service it provided (BL). In 1982, the Red Cross opened the next center, this time in Stockholm. This project also ended due to lack of interest. The first lasting victim support center was launched in 1984 in Södertälje, just south of Stockholm. Per Svensson was one of the pioneers. As a policeman working with people in a local community, Svensson repeatedly met crime victims who, according to him, did not receive

support or protection. As early as 1982, Svensson had visited Lagerbäck, but his interest in victim support had been awakened before that. Larsson explains:

It was the encounter with an old lady who had had her purse snatched and after that did not dare to go out for a walk that really caught his attention. He saw the consequences it had for her. And a lady who had a burglary in her basement storage unit, which most people apparently regard as a trivial matter, but to her, it was devastating, she felt really bad. From that, his thoughts and ideas developed (EL).

Svensson started the local support center in Södertälje in 1984 together with a deaconess, Saara Beckman. The starting point was their backgrounds in police and church work and their strong interest in victim support. The relationship between women’s shelters and victim support centers was tense. The situation has varied over the years, but, as Lagerbäck says:

Well, go back to the 1980s when I dealt with cases that concerned women’s shelters, and I knocked the door and [the manager of the local shelter] refused to let me in, because I shouldn’t contaminate their facilities. No man was allowed there (BL).

Lagerbäck added that there are centers where victim support centers and women’s shelters are combined, and there are also women’s shelters that are completely separate from the victim support centers because men are involved. Victim support centers were open to all victims, while the women’s shelters had a specific target group. Based on this “open-to-all” context, victim support centers could argue that they were needed.

To begin with, Lagerbäck’s and Svensson’s focuses were slightly different. Lagerbäck brought in his professional logic as a psychologist and argued for professional support for victims, while Svensson aimed for support provided by volunteers, from one human being to another (EL). The different constituents were not really an issue between the two men who later became the entrepreneurs who created VSS. Although they debated which of their centers was the first, their discussions were friendly, and they remained open to different approaches (EL). In the retrospective interview, Lagerbäck highlighted that victim support volunteers were doing good initial work and that Svensson was right to involve them. We could argue that the entrepreneurs added logic from three broad fields: criminal justice, psychology, and the church. They implicitly combined ideas from voluntary work and professional work. Lagerbäck and Svensson were both strong institutional entrepreneurs with a deep interest in the issue based on experiences from their own backgrounds in different parts of the criminal justice system.

As the two entrepreneurs joined forces, a national victim support organization started to develop. They were passionate about building an organization and gaining national interest as well as raising awareness of victim support as an issue. Lagerbäck and Svensson had the essential characteristics of institutional entrepreneurs, as described by Battilana (2006), specifically, a strong interest and strong social positions. These positions were thus far based on their experiences from other organizations in the field, where they had learned the logic. Therefore, they had the ability to relate to the other actors in the field and to know what kinds of actions made sense (cf. Fligstein 1997). This would later give VSS a social position and legitimacy. In the very beginning, the entrepreneurs had no social position as representatives of victim support, as this group was not recognized. They successfully gained their position through their work in pushing the crime victim issue onto the political agenda. In doing so, they did not position victims in opposition to offenders but claimed that victims should have the same access to support as offenders. Ideas of equal access to services related well to the Swedish welfare model way of thinking, but the entrepreneurs also pointed out deficits in the welfare system. In a quote that illuminates the core of VSS's ideas, Lagerbäck says:

It is a task for society to protect its citizens against enemies as criminals, just as we have a defense against alien enemies. And if society fails in that, it has a moral responsibility to give victims of crime restoration in different ways, and then there is a need for professionals. Because, as I see it, as an offender, you have access to all kinds of professionals when you are in prison or on probation. Thus, you should also have access as a victim. Well, of course, I realize that there is also a need for support from a fellow human; there is a certain value in being there, not because I am a psychologist, but because I care for you. And that is the Good Samaritan (BL).

### Getting Victims on the Agenda: 1988–89

In 1988, the first year for which we can find documents in VSS's national archive, it is clear that the entrepreneurs' efforts included providing external information to decision-makers at high political levels while providing internal information to local centers. In this way, the entrepreneurs created a base for the umbrella organization, with parallel support from both the outside and inside. There are letters from the entrepreneurs to the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Social Affairs, the National Head of the Police, the administration of the two largest cities, and all members of the Swedish Parliament. In late April 1988, the

entrepreneurs sent a letter to the Ministry of Justice as a reaction to a television news broadcast. In the broadcast, the head of the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention stated that interventions from the state and professionals needed to be combined with voluntary work. The letter demanded that the Ministry further investigate possibilities for volunteer-based victim support and provided information about the work being carried out within VSS. A week later, the entrepreneurs sent the next letter to the Ministry of Justice. This letter called for the education of professionals and state authorities on crime victims' reactions and needs and ended with an invitation to visit VSS.

Most letters to public bodies in 1988 follow the same structure. On the one hand, there is a demand relating to some central issue; on the other hand, there is information about VSS. The issues represented in the letters from this first year are HIV tests of rapists, financial support for VSS volunteers, and different ideas for funding a Crime Victim Fund. In one of the letters, the entrepreneurs invited a representative from the National Police Authority to be a member of its national board. It is evident that the letters were part of a campaign aiming to increase political interest in victim support—a way of seeking external legitimacy.

Parallel to this, the entrepreneurs aspired to create internal legitimacy. In September 1988, the entrepreneurs sent a letter containing information about the national organization to the eight local support centers that existed at the time. The letter stated that four local centers were represented on the interim national board. It also included information about VSS's first annual meeting, which was to be held in May 1989. At the inaugural meeting, six local centers were represented on the proposed board.

On February 22, 1989, VSS held a public event for crime victims in Stockholm. The Archbishop of Sweden was involved and expressed his full support for VSS and for the idea of victim support. This was supposed to be a one-time event; however, at VSS's annual meeting shortly afterward, Lagerbäck suggested that it should be an annual event (Motion, March 6, 1989). The event later turned into the European Day for Victims of Crime, supported by the European Commission, a day that is also referred to in Sweden as "International Crime Victims Day." As Lagerbäck explains:

From the beginning, it was me who brought it up, as an initiative in Sweden, that we should have a day for crime victims. And then, I was a member of the European Forum for Victim Services [...] So I took it to the board [of the European Forum for Victim Services] and I gave a very beautiful description of how we did things in Sweden, that we lit candles and

had the church bells ringing, and they thought it was wonderful. It wasn't that comprehensive, but that is how the International Crime Victims Day was created (BL).

On February 20, 1989, two days before this first manifestation for crime victims in Sweden, Lagerbäck sent a letter to the Ministry of Justice with the idea of creating a Crime Victim Fund that was funded by offenders. The letter stated *...that a central crime victims' fund will be built up by anyone who is convicted in a criminal case having to pay X amount to the fund.* In the interview, Lagerbäck stated that his experiences working in different organizations allowed him to elaborate on different ideas and combine them in new ways, which Battilana (2006) describes as essential characteristics for institutional entrepreneurs. The idea of the fund came from his work as a psychologist at an insurance company, where a woman who had been subjected to a crime had asked him who would pay for her therapy:

I answered honestly; it is paid for by tax money or insurance. And I thought, hell no; it has to be those who commit the crime. It is reasonable that they pay, and then I started to raise the question of a crime victims' fund. [...] The idea came from Belgium, where there was a similar fund into which fines were allocated, and with that as a framework, we developed the idea and suggested that convicted offenders should pay a certain amount into a crime victims' fund. And it was a pedagogical idea that the offender should pay (BL).

Placing the victim issue on the agenda was a step forward in creating VSS, but there were more dimensions to this issue. Researchers have shown that policies for "crime victims" in other countries, primarily the USA, have not represented the interests, opinions, and needs of the victims themselves. Rather, victim reform has served as a way to promote punitive criminal justice policies (e.g., Elias 1993; Garland 2001; Simon 2007; Wacquant 2009). Hence, the fact that the Swedish government put victims on the political agenda did not mean that it gave a voice to the victims themselves, but it did allow VSS to be established.

### Establishing a National Association: 1989–90

Lagerbäck was VSS's first chair of the national board, but he left his position after just a few months in February 1989, when he became the coordinator for the European Forum for Victim Services. Svensson acted as chair until the inaugural meeting in May 1989, when he was formally elected. In 1990, when VSS received funding from the

Ministry of Justice, Svensson became VSS's secretary general and Lagerbäck took over as chair again. While Lagerbäck wrote the letters to ministers and other external parties, Svensson dealt with the internal work of the organization and strove to further develop the activities at the local centers (EL). Svensson was also the one who initiated the establishment of VSS and organized the inaugural meeting. Some of the local centers voiced concerns about it being too soon to form a national organization, but Svensson was eager to get it going (BL).

### Anchoring the Organization in its Context

VSS's archival documents from 1989 mainly discuss various practicalities within the organization, but there are also signs of external activities and support. We were not able to find documents on external claims for victim support, but there was external support for the organization. For example, on January 30, 1989, the Archbishop of the Church of Sweden expressed his support for VSS. As a result, Lagerbäck wrote a proposal to the annual meeting in which he suggested that VSS has a dialog with the Church of Sweden. He also proposed an annual national offertory whereby funding would be raised for local victim support centers' work. A document from the National Police Authority contains information about its full support for the establishment of local victim support centers. In addition, there are copies of letters showing that toward the end of the year, VSS had received a lump sum of funding from the Ministry of Justice. In 1989, there were also newspaper articles written by the entrepreneurs to raise awareness of victims' needs and about the opening of eight new local victim support centers. The increasing public and political interest in crime victims, together with support from the police and the Church of Sweden, gave VSS validity and engaged people in the local victim support centers. VSS hence started to achieve both external and internal legitimacy.

As soon as the national organization VSS was founded, Svensson started traveling around the country encouraging people to start new local victim support centers, during which time he received support from his colleague at the Södertälje center, Saara Beckman. Svensson visited local police organizations, where he lectured about victim support. He spoke about his background as a policeman in close contact with people in the community (BL, EL). As both a policeman and a representative of VSS, an organization with national support, Svensson became a strong entrepreneur.

The Church of Sweden's support for VSS was both ideological and financial, and it engaged people in the local communities. The support from the police was more administrative; they helped open new local centers and

facilitated VSS's contact with crime victims. In 1989, the National Police Authority published a handbook aimed at supporting the establishment of victim support centers. That same year, VSS met its first backlash. Three social work students reported three local VSS centers to the Parliamentary Ombudsmen, who are appointed by the Swedish Parliament to ensure that public authorities and their staff comply with the law. The issue in question was that the local police gave information about crime victims to the local victim support centers, which the law does not allow (the former Secrecy Law 1980:100). After the Ombudsmen's investigation, the police changed their routines and had to ask victims whether or not they wanted to be referred to the support center.

In its first bylaws and operational plan, VSS stated that the local victim support centers were the foundation of the national association. This foundation was laid out by VSS through the work of the entrepreneurs as they managed the establishment of the local centers. VSS's first aim was to establish local victim support centers in Sweden's 118 police districts at that time. The established role of VSS was to:

- Take responsibility for an overall program in order to improve skills at the local centers.
- Pass on good ideas from one center to the others.
- Give a helping hand and support centers that are being established.
- Provide information and education.
- Create a debate in society about victims of crime so that their needs and rights can be met.

The archival material from 1989 reveals that VSS applied for funding from a wide range of organizations, such as insurance companies, farmers' associations, and all bishops in Sweden. In September, an agreement was reached with a study association, SV, about education for VSS's members and the local centers. It was decided that all education should be organized by and provided through SV (Minutes, VSS National Board Meeting, September 15, 1989). In May 1990, SV created materials to use in volunteer training: "People in Crisis" (Minutes, VSS National Board Meeting, May 11, 1990). A VSS newsletter from September 1990 stated: *To be able to reach our goal of 118 local centers we need to work on different levels. Through the police, the city council and local politicians, and with SV's local departments. SV pays for the training.* At this point in time, Larsson worked at SV. When we asked about how SV came to be responsible for VSS's training, she said: *Well, Per met someone from there. They were both in Södertälje, so it was more of a coincidence... SV was involved in social issues* (EL).

VSS's connection to the church was also strong. Lagerbäck says: *The largest manifestation we had, or*

*maybe it wasn't the largest, but it was in Stockholm Cathedral.* (BL) A famous actress participated and read a short story by Stig Dagerman: "To Kill a Child." The story is about a child killed in a car accident and was originally written in 1948 as part of a road safety campaign. The story has an atmosphere of foreboding, where everyone already knows what will happen, resulting in a very sensitive and strong story. A well-known singer then performed. When describing this event, Lagerbäck emphasized that this kind of manifestation raised public interest.

Moreover, VSS had close ties with insurance companies. Lagerbäck worked as a psychologist for one insurance company, Skandia. Another insurance company, Trygg Hansa, became involved early in the development of VSS. Larsson said that *"There was also an enthusiast at Trygg Hansa"* (EL). Trygg Hansa's engagement became very important in relation to VSS's logo. The first local victim support centers had different logos, including a deacon's symbol and a bird with a broken wing (BL). The Södertälje center had a life buoy, which was a suitable symbol for the national organization. The Swedish word for life buoy, *boj*, was the same as the Swedish acronym for Victim Support Sweden: BOJ (Brottsofferjouren). But there was a problem—Trygg Hansa's logo was also a life buoy, which was very similar to the life buoy logo VSS intended to adopt. This led to many formal and informal discussions. Nevertheless, in May 1990, VSS sent an application to the Patent and Registration Office to register this life buoy as its logo, with support from Trygg Hansa, and the logo was accepted later that year.

The archival documents from 1990 show that VSS had already become a consultative body by this time. For example, the government sent an inquiry to VSS about an international youth exchange together with an invitation to submit comments. In its response, VSS underlined the importance of legal protection and support for youth victimized abroad. In addition, VSS highlighted its support as a resource for Swedish youth. At the end of 1990, VSS received another lump sum of money from the Ministry of Justice. In an undated document from 1990, VSS confirmed a deal with SV on a variety of training sessions related to psychology, how to start a local victim support center, and how to be chair and treasurer of a local victim support center. Insurance companies also supported these training sessions. As one document stated: *Trygg Hansa pays for conference rooms, lunches, and the hotel, so it is only dinner that is not funded.*

From the archival documents, it is clear that VSS managed to convince other organizations to pay for its costs, primarily the study association SV or insurance companies. This was essential, as VSS had little funding. However, without stable funding and as a new organization in the field, VSS already had political influence, not only

for its own legitimacy as an organization but also for the issue of victim support in general. Based on information from VSS, the Liberal Party had presented two questions about victims to Parliament (Minutes, VSS National Board, January 29, 1990).

### Keeping the Organization United

Most archival documents from 1990 include internal information, but there are also letters sent to the Minister of Justice and other politicians with information on how the number of local victim support centers was growing. VSS's board discussed many practical issues related to its office and to recruiting new members and volunteers. The board decided that the volunteers should be *People who are of benefit to and assist in the satisfaction of victims and thus of the association* (Newsletter, September 1990). In several documents from this time, VSS highlighted that volunteers should undergo continuous assessment during training. After training, the local board should decide whether or not the volunteers should be allowed to give support to crime victims.

Parallel to this, Svensson continued to travel around the country, inspiring new victim support centers to open. At this time, Sweden did not have a tradition of establishing new nonprofit organizations acting on behalf of vulnerable groups. These kinds of organizations existed to some extent in connection with the Church of Sweden, but they were usually part of the public welfare system. Most nonprofit organizations that started during this period were based on people forming popular movements to fight for their own rights or well-being (Meeuwisse and Sunesson 1998). VSS differed from these organizations in the sense that its focus was to organize help for others.

By the end of 1990, VSS had become a recognized organization. In December 1990, VSS had a logo, had received governmental funding, and had structured its activities through a board, members, and a newsletter. By then, there were 30 local victim support centers (Newsletter, December 1990). Furthermore, VSS had started to develop national guidelines for the local centers regarding volunteer training. VSS had the support of and recognition from the Ministry of Justice, the National Police, the Church of Sweden, insurance companies, and a study association. There were also different kinds of local support for the local centers. Both external and internal legitimacy was now established.

Through their work in 1989 and 1990, the entrepreneurs managed to “make sense” of the organization, as Weick (2001) puts it. They generated external interest in VSS and began to build a common internal understanding of the organization and its local work. Using Weick's (2001) concepts, they laid out a cause map for VSS, a cognitive

map of understanding that won both internal and external approval. As VSS became connected to different organizations, such as the Church of Sweden, the police, insurance companies, and study associations, it integrated the logics from these organizations into a logic of its own. VSS was not similar to any of the organizations it cooperated with; the main idea was to add something new to these organizations. On these grounds, it could grow without competing with other organizations. One of the main reasons for VSS's growth was the uniformity in ideas regarding its practice, the idea that victims need support and ideas about how victims should be supported.

### Dramatic Growth: 1991–92

In September 1991, general elections were held in Sweden. The Liberal-Conservative coalition won the election and took over from the Social Democrats. The impact of the election year is evident in VSS's correspondence. While internal affairs dominated VSS's archival material in 1990, most of the documents in 1991 concerned correspondence with politicians. Still, there is nothing in the archive showing external demands for victim support. VSS sent individual letters to the private addresses of politicians who had some kind of involvement in issues relating to crime and victimization. VSS also sent letters to the Minister of Justice and all members of Parliament. The letters provided information about VSS, the local centers, and the importance of VSS's work. Furthermore, VSS invited politicians to visit the organization and emphasized the need for funding.

Before the election, in July, August, and September 1991, Lagerbäck sent letters to the Social Democratic Minister of Justice, Laila Freivalds, thanking her for her support. After the election, in October, Lagerbäck sent three letters to the new conservative Minister of Justice, Gun Hellsvik, which all related to the funding of VSS. The first letter was about funding for employees at VSS's office and for a VSS newsletter. The second letter concerned a Crime Victim Fund, and the third letter argued that the Probation Service ought to take victims' perspectives into account. The new Liberal-Conservative government had ideas about reforming crime policy, and VSS was eager to ensure that victims were represented in these reforms.

Alongside this, VSS continued to inspire the creation of new centers. Between January and March 1991, VSS representatives attended 22 local events. This averages to two local events per week. It is evident that VSS worked intensively both internally and externally. At the annual meeting in 1991, VSS stated:



Our aim is to let the victim support organization become established and become part of society, a resource that social services and even the police expect. But it should be clear that it will take some time before we reach that point. (Statement at the Annual Meeting 1991)

Most of VSS's internal discussions concerned practical issues on the division of labor, responsibilities within the organization, and the continuing work to establish new local centers. The internal documents also include statements from the Parliamentary Ombudsmen explaining that the law does not allow the police to routinely send information about crime victims to the local centers. The Parliamentary Ombudsmen stated that *I cannot see that there is any practical need for such routines, as it is always a matter for the victim to decide whether or not he or she wants contact with a victim support center*. In the newsletter sent out to all local centers, VSS describes the Parliamentary Ombudsmen's statement as a *general opinion* and explains that:

The Parliamentary Ombudsman has no direct experience of our work. At the time of reporting a crime, it is usually difficult for victims to decide whether or not they need help. If there is no immediate dialogue about the emotional distress, there is a risk that this can remain untreated. This can, in the long run, lead to a lower quality of life, as psychological resources are bound to the untreated trauma (Letter to local centers November 4, 1991).

From the letter, we can see that while VSS took responsibility for informing all the local centers about the Parliamentary Ombudsman's statement, it did so in resistance, as indicated by its diminishing of the statement. Svensson and Lagerbäck met in person with the new Minister of Justice and tried to convince her to work to change the law so that referrals could be made from the police, but they were without success. The Parliamentary Ombudsmen's decision started a disconnection between the police and VSS, both nationally and locally. From working in very close cooperation with the police, victim support centers became more detached and independent, at the expense of access to victim referrals. This could be seen as a backlash, but it could also be regarded as a step in the process of becoming an independent organization.

VSS's independence from the police allowed for new partnerships. In 1991, VSS started collaborating with other non-governmental and nonprofit organizations, such as the National Organization for Women's Shelters (ROKS) and Children's Right in Society (BRIS). In February 1992, a VSS newsletter sparked a debate about whether or not local victim support centers could criticize the police. The

newsletter noted that victim support centers are dependent upon the police in their work, but it is important to act in the interests of the victim and to express criticism when needed.

The documents from 1992 mainly concern internal affairs, but there was also information about contact with the Minister of Justice. We can now see reflections of "business as usual," as most arguments in the documents are repeated from earlier years. VSS still had problems finding sufficient funding, and the entrepreneurs continued to send information to local victim support centers and politicians. The internal discussion reflects a growing organization, with some discussions about connecting local centers in regions. There were also calls for more professionalized roles within the organization, for instance, an education coordinator. Until then, the information between VSS and the local centers had been in the form of newsletters. After some planning, VSS founded a national magazine.

In 1992, the organization was undoubtedly well established. After 3 years of activity, it had taken its position in the organizational field and had won acceptance from the state. The former Social Democratic government supported VSS, but the support from the Liberal-Conservative coalition was even stronger, as VSS's ideas were a very good match for the policies of the new government. When the conservative Minister of Justice gave a speech at the VSS annual meeting in 1992, she said: *The non-profit segment attracts creativity, commitment, and initiative in a way that is not possible in a public authority* (Newsletter June 1992).

Later, in 1994, the Liberal-Conservative government proposed one of the most noteworthy bills for victim support organizations, namely the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority and the Crime Victim Fund. The fund is financed through a fine that everyone convicted of a crime punishable by incarceration is obligated to pay. The fund supports research projects and other activities aiming at improving the situation for victims. The idea of the fund and of offenders financing it was one of the first ideas launched by the entrepreneurs. Now, it has gained political attention. The female Minister of Justice brought the proposal to the Swedish Parliament. Lagerbäck says: *Gun Hellsvik and I used to say that we had a child together, and that is the Crime Victim Fund* (BL). Since 1994, the fund has been VSS's main source of funding.

## Conclusions

The aim of this study has been to understand how it was possible to establish a new nationwide nonprofit organization in just a few years in the absence of political or

public demand. This article traces the emergence of an organizational field in the changing Swedish social and political context and the activities of the key entrepreneurs as they worked to create an organization with legitimacy. Like Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), we account for the ecology of an organization in an attempt to understand it. We can grasp the success of VSS by looking at the “cause map,” i.e., the structure that holds the organization together (Weick 2001), which the entrepreneurs created for VSS in just a few years. This map gave VSS space and a task to fulfill. It made VSS known to the general public, government politicians, and volunteers at the local support centers. VSS “made sense” as an organization and was regarded as performing reasonable work, even though there were no victims calling for support, at least not in the public debate, nor were there other organizations claiming that they did not have the resources to support victims.

Nevertheless, victim support was added to the political agenda through the entrepreneurs’ strong lobbying, which used the feelings of the “victim” as a source of support and legitimacy (cf. Garland 2001). It was a “presumption of logics,” where the inferred understanding of the suffering victim in need of support became a common understanding through manifestations, debate in newspapers, and the entrepreneurs’ passionate contact with important politicians. Even so, the entrepreneurs did not present any facts or evidence that victims needed this support, for example, in the form of claims from victims. The absence of these statements in the archival material does not say anything about whether or not victims were in need of VSS’s support. The point made is that VSS found its place *parallel* to an emerging discourse arguing that victims need support, not as a response to claims expressed *before* VSS was established.

The results of this article acknowledge the power of entrepreneurs in establishing an organization. DiMaggio (1988) argues that some agents are better than others, and the two entrepreneurs for VSS must be seen as a highly influential pair. Their passionate engagement, individual skills, and combination of approaches from their different backgrounds had an obvious impact. Together, they covered a wide and extremely relevant range of organizations, logics, and skills. As Fligstein (1997) argues, the outcome is dependent on the social skills of the entrepreneurs.

The entrepreneurs’ combined logics from criminal justice, the church, and psychology. Their backgrounds as professionals in these fields gave external legitimacy first to themselves as entrepreneurs and later to VSS as an organization. The entrepreneurs managed to create a specific “victim support logic” from adjacent fields and logics. They then spread this new logic to the volunteers through education and to politicians through discussions and lobbying. They created a logic that could embed the

actors in the organization and create a context where the actors could find meaning in and appreciation for their work (cf. Garud et al. 2007). Furthermore, the organization was anchored in a number of organizations. Insurance companies, a study association, and the police supported VSS in its practical work.

Establishing VSS was not without conflicts or problems. The initial problem was that the first local centers in the early 1980s did not attract any interest. At this time, Sweden had not, as van Dijk (1988) put it, “been bitten by the victimagogic bug.” The first centers were not based on the specific combination of skills and backgrounds of VSS’s entrepreneurs, which finally made the “bug” bite. Another conflict came when the Parliamentary Ombudsmen criticized the police for handing over information about victims to VSS, which led to new police routines and a new relationship between the police and VSS. This event was a threat to the logic that VSS was built on, that volunteers at the local centers would contact victims referred by the police. This idea was fundamental for VSS, as it never emphasized victims as actors. Instead, VSS saw the volunteers as actors and the victims as objects for their efforts and support. When the police suddenly had to ask victims for their permission before sending their contact information to VSS, the victims became acting subjects. This was not the entrepreneurs’ projected image of victims; victims should be the recipients of VSS’s support, not acting subjects. If victims were not referred, the whole idea of the organization was threatened. Nevertheless, after the 1991 government elections, VSS had a clearer position, as the idea of supporting victims found its place in a center-right crime policy. The idea of the “crime victim” came to support a shift away from prevention and rehabilitation in Swedish crime policy, even if this was never an explicit idea of the entrepreneurs.

## Discussion

The results of this article can advise entrepreneurs who strive to establish new organizations. The results also raise issues for a wider discussion. First, this study has described the successful establishment of an organization. There is a lack of research on how new organizations are developed, especially when they are part of constructing a new organizational field. Our results add some lessons for entrepreneurial leaders working in the absence of a well-defined organizational field on how to establish a new organization. All these lessons would benefit from more research in order to learn more about dominant factors and whether they are valid in all contexts. We summarize the lessons learned in a few short bullet points. Entrepreneurs need to:

- Have a strong engagement with the organization and its idea.
- Be connected to partners with a strong engagement but with different perspectives so that they complement each other.
- Have good knowledge in the specific area and a clear vision of the cognitive map for the organization so that a logic can be formed.
- Work toward both internal and external legitimacy for the logic of the organization.
- Anchor the organization in several other fields by claiming relevance for the different fields but also be clear that the new organization does not compete for the same resources.

Second, we must consider the relationship between the main ideas behind establishing the organization and the demand for it, which in this case concerns victim support organizations and victims' needs. Victimization is often considered a temporary personal experience, which means that it is not obviously an issue to organize around. There are examples in Sweden and other countries where crime victims have organized self-help groups of a more temporary character after experiencing the same kind of victimization. One example is families exposed to burglary who arrange neighborhood watches. With the exception of victim groups centered around violence against women, it is uncommon for crime victims to organize for long-term political work. One of the reasons for this lack of interest could be the temporality and the low interest in assuming the identity of being a victim, but there might be a wide variety of other reasons.

In this article, we have shown that VSS's entrepreneurs took the preferential right to interpret crime victims' needs when these appeared on the political agenda. We cannot say from this study whether the entrepreneurs' way of understanding victims' needs matches their actual needs. We also do not know whether the organizational field would have developed without the agency of the entrepreneurs or whether some kind of organizational field would have developed eventually, even if VSS had never come into existence. We know that victims tend to refer very positively to VSS; however, they tend to argue in more general terms and say that it is good that the organization exists for those who need it, "but I myself do not need it" (Jägervi 2014). The question of what role nonprofit victim support plays for victims, as well as for society, deserves more study, not only in Sweden but in any context.

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