

### 3 Spontaneous Venturing to Organize Compassion in the Aftermath of a Disaster

On Black Saturday there were three towns that were absolutely smashed. Kinglake, Marysville and Flowerdale. Two hundred and twenty-four homes were lost in Flowerdale. Thirteen people died. [I'm here to tell you] about a community [member] who said "we've got a problem and we've got to solve it ourselves." What frustrates me in life ... is that as soon as something goes wrong, [people say,] "they've got to fix it. ..." We've got to own our outcomes and when something's important to us, we've got to do something about it because when there is no "they," you are the "they." We are the "they." We've got to say, "What are we going to do about this?," because when you're faced with that and that's what's left of your town, and there's no one else. ... In Flowerdale, there was no "they." There was no one else. It was just the locals.

—Responder to Black Saturday bushfires (quoted in Williams 2010)

Many events can lead to human suffering. Natural disasters, though they often surprise those affected, occur somewhere in the world on a regular basis, often leading to suffering for many. For example, the 2011 annual report of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies reported 406 natural disasters (excluding wars, conflict-related famines, technological disasters, diseases, and epidemics) worldwide in 2010 alone (Armstrong et al. 2011). All told, these natural disasters generated more than \$123 billion in damages, killed over 300 million people, and displaced or otherwise negatively affected an additional 300 million people. Although 2010 was an outlier with respect to the number of people affected, these devastating events consistently cause substantial suffering (Armstrong et al. 2011).<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the direct damage caused by a disaster, additional problems often stem from the organizational response to the emergency (Dynes 1974). There are well-known examples of established organizations failing to effectively help disaster victims. In 2005 the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other government

agencies mounted an ineffective response to Hurricane Katrina (Sobel and Leeson 2006), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) delayed in helping victims of the 2010 Haiti earthquake (Zanotti 2010), and various international organizations, including the United Nations, have stumbled in attempts to effectively address disasters, including the 2008 Nargis cyclone in Myanmar and the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan province, China (Kapucu 2011). The evidence suggests that established disaster response organizations are not sufficiently effective at quickly alleviating the suffering of all disaster victims (e.g., Schneider 1992; Van Wart and Kapucu 2011; Zanotti 2010).

Though organizational theory scholars studying this phenomenon usually begin with the existence of an organization, then turn to theorizing about the extent (and mechanisms) of alleviating suffering, focusing instead on the exercise of compassion to alleviate suffering suggests that other approaches to disaster response are available. Compassion may be conceptualized as “(1) noticing or attending to another’s suffering, (2) feelings that are other-regarding and resemble empathic concern, and (3) responses aimed at easing the suffering” (Lilius, Worline, et al. 2011: 874; see also Clark 1997; Dutton et al. 2006). To successfully address the needs of the suffering in a disaster response scenario, compassion needs to be organized to “extract, generate, and coordinate resources—e.g., social support, food, shelter—but [also to] ... calibrat[e] the response to individuals’ unique needs” (Dutton et al. 2006: 61). Even here, some organizations are able and inclined to harness their normal structures in response to members’ pain (Dutton et al. 2006), whereas others are less able or less inclined to do so (Delbecq 2010; Hazen 2003, 2008; Kanov et al. 2004). But what happens when established organizations’ ability to obtain, create, and organize resources is itself significantly weakened?

The literature on disaster response shows that the effectiveness of established organizations’ responses to a disaster is often limited and that entrepreneurial disaster response groups appear to emerge and provide responses when established organizations do not or cannot (see Drabek 1986; Drabek and McEntire 2003; Stallings and Quarantelli 1985; see also chapter 2). By exploring the relatively uncharted world of new ventures that come into existence to alleviate victim suffering after natural disasters, we hope to improve compassion organizing processes to lessen suffering after natural disasters.

Drawing on our earlier research (Shepherd and Williams 2014), in this chapter we sketch out a theory of organizing compassion through

spontaneous venturing—that is, the spontaneous creation of new ventures—in response to a disaster. Here the difference between volunteering and entrepreneurial venturing should be noted. Volunteering involves offering one's services free of charge to an entity, a venture or a firm, that organizes a response. Entrepreneurial venturing entails the organizing of resources, including volunteers, to pursue a potential opportunity, which in this case is the opportunity to alleviate suffering in the aftermath of a natural disaster. By combining evidence from the disaster response to the Black Saturday bushfires with theories of compassion, organizing, and motivation, we hope to generate insights into how organizing through spontaneous venturing can alleviate suffering. By *spontaneous venturing*, we mean the rapid emergence of a de novo or de alio new venture. In the context of a natural disaster for which outside resources are abundant yet established organizations are insufficiently effective at organizing compassion, spontaneous venturing is an effective means of customizing abundant resources, that is, customizing the large scale and scope of resources provided from sources unaffected by the natural disaster and delivering those resources quickly to alleviate suffering. This form of compassion organizing is effective because it is quick and highly customized to victims' needs.

This sketch of a theory suggests three new insights.

First, while aid organizations such as the Red Cross already exist to alleviate individuals' suffering, and some are able to adapt their standard structures and routines to help during disasters, there are still times when these organizations are unable to fully alleviate suffering using their normal structures and routines. At such times the primary source of compassionate response resources to alleviate suffering (Frost et al. 2006) may come from outside the disaster area in the form of entrepreneurial ventures. Looking at such alternative approaches enables us to explore individuals' suffering (and the alleviation thereof) beyond prevailing organizational boundaries, specifically the ways in which local individuals who are affected by the disaster facilitate compassion organizing to meet community members' needs. Furthermore, while the extant research on compassion has highlighted how those who are more fortunate often provide resources to those who are less fortunate (Dutton et al. 2006; Lilius, Kanov, et al. 2011), we investigate a self-organizing aspect to compassion—that is, when locals who are themselves suffering organize compassion to meet community members' as well as their own postdisaster needs.

Second, victims' suffering can serve as a signal for entrepreneurial opportunity, as the prompt for the prosocial motivation of spontaneous entrepreneurs, and as an expression of the empathy of the broader community, which becomes a source of resources. Though the formation of temporary groups has been studied in a variety of contexts, including filmmaking (Bechky 2006; Goodman and Goodman 1976), firefighting (Bigley and Roberts 2001; Weick 1993; Weick and Roberts 1993), and education (Miles 1964, 1977), and though this literature has highlighted the value of temporary organizations (Bigley and Roberts 2001; Faulkner and Anderson 1987) and the ways knowledge (Hale, Dulek, and Hale 2005; Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa, and Hollingshead 2007) and actions (Bechky 2006) are coordinated within these temporary organizations, there is only a limited understanding of the emotions that motivate such ventures' creation and termination. We investigate the compassionate creation of temporary organizations by exploring victims' suffering as the signal of an entrepreneurial opportunity, the prosocial motivation of spontaneous entrepreneurs, and the empathy of the broader community as a source of resources.

The third insight is that unlike many new ventures, which are most interested in achieving economic profits (Barney 1991; Shane and Venkataraman 2000), the entrepreneurial process for organizing altruistic resources to deliver products and services to alleviate suffering from a natural disaster has economic sustainability as a utilitarian need, not a goal: the ventures must be sustainable to continue to deliver the non-economic benefits (Bansal 2005; Patzelt and Shepherd 2011). Even though these organizations are a critical mechanism for alleviating suffering and the claim that the creation of new ventures is a central issue for the field of entrepreneurship research (Gartner 1985), organization and entrepreneurship scholars have not sufficiently explored the spontaneous creation of new ventures.

These three insights—spontaneous entrepreneurial aid may come from ad hoc, informal groups outside a disaster area, victims' suffering may prompt such an entrepreneurial compassionate response, and entrepreneurial groups need to have a reasonable economic footing to be able to deliver aid—are the main points of our book. In this chapter we first explore the relevant theoretical contexts of organizing compassion, disaster response, and organizational emergence, then consider evidence from the Black Saturday bushfires disaster to present the spontaneous venturing model of disaster response.

## Theoretical Background

### Organizing Compassion

Taking a positive psychology perspective, previous scholars (Cameron and Caza 2004) have investigated and elucidated the ways compassion can be organized to lessen individuals' suffering after adverse experiences (e.g., Dutton 2003; Dutton et al. 2006; Kanov et al. 2004; Lilius et al. 2008). This suffering, which can result from a variety of experiences, including disasters, personal tragedies, mistakes, or work-related events (Frost 2003), entails "the experience of pain or loss that evokes a form of anguish that threatens an individual's sense of meaning about his or her personal existence" (Dutton et al. 2006: 60). To help individuals overcome this suffering, organizations can engage in compassion organizing—"a collective response to a particular incident of human suffering that entails the coordination of individual compassion in a particular organizational context" and involves adapting the organization's everyday work structures and routines to help alleviate suffering (Dutton et al. 2006: 62). Compassion organizing is enacted when the organization recognizes members affected by painful or traumatic events (e.g., the loss of a team member's home to fire), which generally stems from existing relationships or connections; feels the grief of the affected team members (e.g., feels sadness for the loss of property resulting from the fire); and responds to painful events using existing structures (e.g., newsletters, meetings) to organize relief efforts (e.g., extracting, generating, coordinating, and calibrating resources to meet the sufferers' needs) (Dutton et al. 2006; Kanov et al. 2004; Lilius, Worline, et al. 2011).

Recent research on compassion organizing has focused on how unaffected organizational members organize to help affected members recover from traumatic or painful events (Dutton, Workman, and Hardin 2014; Dutton et al. 2006; Frost et al. 2006; Worline and Dutton 2017). This compassion organizing helps those suffering organizational members heal from, learn from, and adapt to the adversity facing them (Dutton et al. 2002; Powley and Piderit 2008). As the suffering organizational members benefit from the compassion organizing, it appears that the organization benefits also. Organizing compassion to help organizational members positively influences the view that individuals have of their co-workers and organization (Lilius et al. 2008), promotes organizational resilience (Powley 2009), and enhances firm productivity (Lilius, Worline, et al. 2011).

Although research has shown a number of benefits of compassion organizing, it is not necessarily an easy or emotionally comfortable task. Indeed, it appears that because compassion organizing is effortful and potentially draining, people may be less willing to respond to the subsequent suffering of a colleague (Figley 2002; Frost 2003; Jacobson 2006; Lilius, Worline, et al. 2011). Furthermore, organizations vary in how they respond to suffering *within* the organization (see Dutton, Workman, and Hardin 2014; Kanov, Powley, and Walshe 2017 for review). While some organize compassion to alleviate member suffering (Dutton et al. 2006; Kanov et al. 2004; Lilius, Worline, et al. 2011), other organizations respond with indifference or avoidance (Delbecq 2010; Hazen 2003, 2008), either because organizational members are unsure how to provide for victims' physical or emotional needs (Bento 1994; Charles-Edwards 2000; Hazen 2003) or because strict organizational policies (e.g., overadherence to mechanistic goals, time-off policies, privacy concerns) discourage compassionate responses (Hazen 2003; Stein and Winokuer 1989). These insights into the organizing and potential limits of compassion are of particular relevance to our consideration of the phenomenon of spontaneous entrepreneurship, in which we explore compassion organizing in the aftermath of a major crisis that affects not only many organizational members but also many organizations. Specifically, we extend compassion organizing theory beyond intraorganizational motivations to the creation of new ventures that organize compassion for individuals and communities outside their organizational boundaries.

**Disaster Response** There are two primary research themes in the disaster response literature. The first emphasizes command and control (Siegel 1985), which involves “clearly defined objectives, a division of labor, a formal structure, and a set of policies and procedures” (Schneider 1992: 138) for coordinating individuals and organizations in response to a disaster (Anderson, Compton, and Mason 2005; Department of Homeland Security 2004; Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa, and Hollingshead 2007). Research in this stream has emphasized the importance of planning (Lagadec 1996; Peek and Mileti 2002; Quarantelli 1988) and efficiency (Comfort, Ko, and Zagorecki 2004; Kelly 1995) and highlights the many benefits provided by the planned activities of disaster response organizations, including governments, the Red Cross, and other organizations that plan for and respond to disasters. However, responding to a disaster is difficult under command and control: there

is considerable uncertainty about the damage and suffering caused by the disaster; there are obstacles to traditional means of communication; and differences across organizations' missions, procedures, and routines make coordination difficult (Auf der Heide 1989; Drabek 2005). These challenges have been found to lead to interorganizational conflict and task interference. Vital tasks remain undetected, ignored, or unassigned; inefficiencies arise as multiple actors perform the same task; and there is underutilization of human resources (Marcum, Bevc, and Butts 2012; Webb 2004).

As the limitations of command and control for specific disaster responses have become better recognized (Drabek 1987; Drabek and McEntire 2002, 2003; Kiefer and Montjoy 2006; Neal and Phillips 1995; Quarantelli 1986; Wenger 1992), some scholars have emphasized the need for better planning (Mileti 1989) or restructuring (Britton 1989) to improve the process (i.e., solutions within the command-and-control approach). However, even with improvements in the command-and-control system, there are still gaps between the organized response and the ability to address victims' needs, leading other scholars to explore the phenomenon of emergent behaviors by collectives in response to disasters, especially when established organizations are ineffective or slow in responding (Drabek and McEntire 2002; Marcum, Bevc, and Butts 2012), which is more likely for large disasters (Drabek and McEntire 2002, 2003).

This stream of research on emergent collective behavior to disasters represents a sociological perspective (Drabek and McEntire 2003; Marcum, Bevc, and Butts 2012). It acknowledges the phenomenon that individuals and organizations "converge" at the site of a disaster to help those affected by the disaster (Quarantelli 1986; Waugh and Streib 2006), focuses on disasters as unique social problems (Kreps and Drabek 1996; Quarantelli 1996), and investigates the nature of the social structures created to address these social problems (Kreps and Drabek 1996; Marcum, Bevc, and Butts 2012)—problems that are unlikely to be solved using current approaches or by the government (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006; Roberts, Bea, and Bartles 2001). These emergent response groups often involve the people, organizations, and communities most affected by the disaster (Stephens 1997; Wenger, Quarantelli, and Dynes 1987), who cease current operations to focus their attention, efforts, and resources on completing tasks made salient by the disaster (Auf der Heide 1989). Emergent response groups have been described as having no preexisting structures (e.g., previous group



membership, tasks, roles, or expertise) and as using both nonroutine resources and activities to respond to the nonroutine circumstances disasters create (Drabek and McEntire 2003; Kreps 1990; Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa, and Hollingshead 2007; Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001). These groups appear spontaneously after a disaster (Dynes, Quarantelli, and Kreps 1981; Neal and Phillips 1995), involve collaborative coordination (Stallings and Quarantelli 1985; Voorhees 2008; Waugh and Streib 2006), and are flexible and innovative (Neal and Phillips 1995; Tierney and Trainor 2004). Furthermore, through action, they build trust (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006; Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa, and Hollingshead 2007), legitimacy (Laufer 2007; Voorhees 2008), and knowledge (Drabek 1987; Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa, and Hollingshead 2007). Indeed, these emergent groups can be considered a “new” form of collaboration across individuals, organizations, and sectors for the purpose of facilitating coordination and resource management in response to a disaster (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006; Marcum, Bevc, and Butts 2012). That is, they are distinct from established disaster response groups such as police forces, firefighters, and film crews (Bechky 2006; Bechky and Okhuysen 2011; Bigley and Roberts 2001).

Although this stream of research has acknowledged the importance of emergent groups in response to disasters and details the social structure of these groups (Drabek 1987; Drabek and McEntire 2003), “much remains to be learned about the internal dynamics of these emergent response groups” (Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa, and Hollingshead 2007: 147) from management and organization theory perspectives (Voorhees 2008). Although Majchrzak and co-workers (2007) made an important step in this direction by investigating the transactive memory system of emergent response groups to explain how expertise within a group is coordinated, there is still much to learn about how this behavior emerges to alleviate the large-scale suffering caused by a disaster (Enander 2010).

**Organizational Emergence** New venture creation, including the various concepts associated with organizational emergence, is perhaps the most fundamental concept associated with entrepreneurship (Gartner 1985; Katz and Gartner 1988; Shane and Venkataraman 2000). Entrepreneurship scholars seek to understand how and for what purposes new ventures emerge, including the sociological, psychological, and economic factors that influence decisions to act on opportunities (McMullen and Shepherd 2006; Shane and Venkataraman 2000). Under-



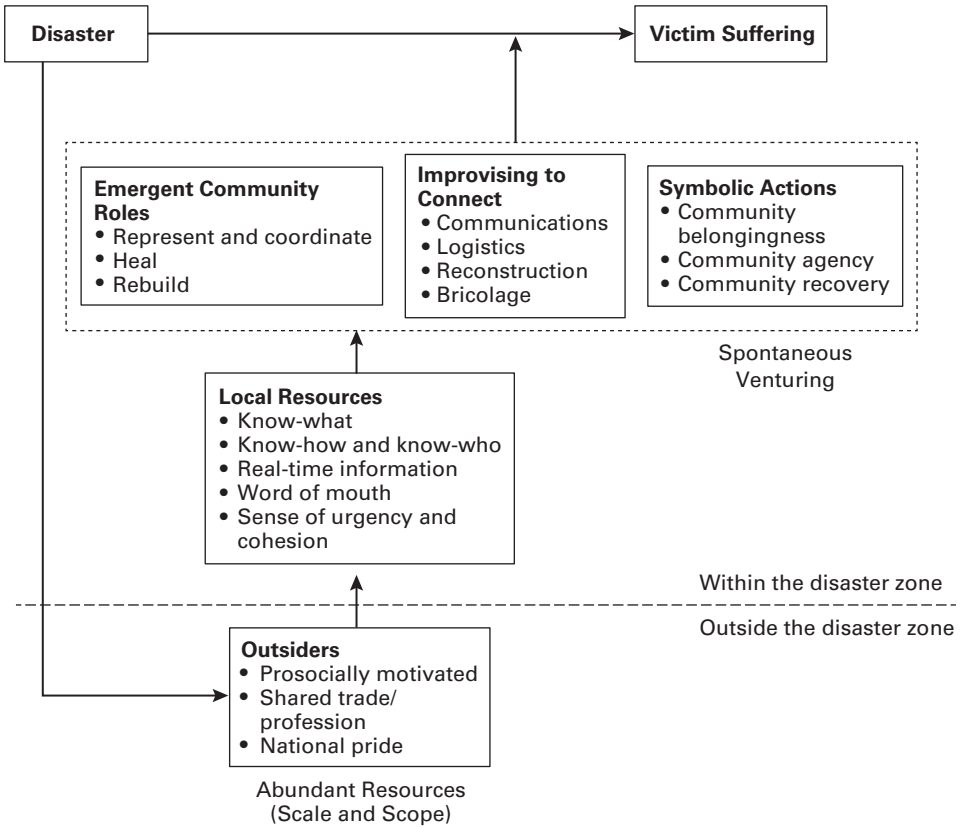
standing these concepts influences other important entrepreneurship concepts, such as firm success (Gartner 1988; Shane and Venkataraman 2000), growth strategies (Wright et al. 2000), and causes of failure (Cardon, Stevens, and Potter 2011; Shepherd, Douglas, and Shanley 2000). Similarly, new ventures have an impact on society by creating jobs, improving economies, and facilitating innovation (Aldrich and Ruef 2006; Delacroix and Solt 1988; Sørensen 2007). However, many ventures fail before taking hold (Brush, Manolova, and Edelman 2008; Gimeno et al. 1997), resulting in a number of outcomes—both positive and negative (Shepherd 2003; Ucbasaran et al. 2013)—for both individuals and society.

Given the impact new venture formation has on individuals and society, many researchers urge an increased focus on the factors influencing firm emergence (Aldrich 1979; Gartner 1985; Katz and Gartner 1988; Reynolds and Miller 1992; Yang and Aldrich 2012). Scholars argue that the most opportune (and empirically challenging) time to learn about founders and the processes of organizational emergence is during the very early stages of venture emergence (Aldrich and Ruef 2006; Katz and Gartner 1988; Yang and Aldrich 2012), before other stakeholders begin to take on significant roles. During the earliest stages of organizational founding, there is extensive heterogeneity in founder routines (Katz and Gartner 1988), approaches to resources (Barney and Arikan 2001; Ireland, Hitt, and Sirmon 2003), perceptions of the environment (Gartner 1985; Katz and Gartner 1988), and creative actions to keep the emerging organization “alive” that are overlooked “if researchers do not begin studying them in the months immediately following their initiation” (Yang and Aldrich 2012: 479; see also Aldrich and Ruef 2006).

Indeed, there is a gap in our understanding of how decision makers manage the extreme uncertainty associated with new venture creation, what forms of value they generate, and what variables influence decisions to act, as well as subsequent choices pertaining to resource acquisition, firm objectives, and venture growth.

### **Spontaneous Venturing as Compassion Organizing in the Aftermath of a Natural Disaster**

Figure 3.1 illustrates our spontaneous venturing model to alleviate suffering after a natural disaster (building on Shepherd and Williams 2014). The figure recognizes the large amount and wide variety of resources generated by outsiders in response to a disaster through the



**Figure 3.1**

Spontaneous Venturing in the Aftermath of a Disaster to Alleviate Suffering

Source: Shepherd and Williams (2014).

mechanisms of prosocial motivation, affinity through shared trade or professional careers, and national pride. Although these compassionate resources are large in scale and broad in scope, they need to be customized and quickly delivered to victims by those in the disaster zone. While numerous physical resources are depleted by a disaster, many nonphysical resources remain (and are even enhanced), including local knowledge (i.e., know-what, know-how, and know-who of the geographic region), local means of communication, and a strong sense of cohesion—all stemming from the identity derived from being local. These resources help explain spontaneous venturing to alleviate suffering through newly created ventures' (1) performance of emergent community roles through representing and coordinating the commu-

nity, healing the community, or rebuilding the community; (2) improvisation to make connections in terms of communications, logistics, reconstruction, and bricolage; and (3) undertaking of symbolic actions to communicate community belongingness, agency, and recovery. In the discussions that follow, we detail the nature of our model. In appendix 3.A we describe the spontaneous ventures referred to in this chapter.

### **Broader Community as a Source of Compassionate Resources**

Although the Black Saturday bushfires caused considerable destruction in the disaster zone, they also unlocked numerous resources on a large scale. The spontaneous entrepreneurs recognized, or came to realize, that their local communities were nested within larger communities. When these nested communities were devastated and fighting for their survival, figuratively and literally, members of the broader community were highly prosocially motivated—that is, they wanted to put forth effort out of their desire to assist others (Batson 1998; De Dreu 2006; Grant 2008; Grant and Berry 2011; Grant and Sumanth 2009)—for a number of reasons.

First, some members of the broader community felt a personal connection to the devastation. Kate Harland, a registered nurse from Melbourne who volunteered to help victims, described her experience:

I watched the news on television, and on Sunday, I listened to the radio, and I couldn't believe what had happened. I thought, "This is dreadful," but after the initial shock, I wasn't thinking of doing anything. Then I heard that Brian Naylor had died, and his was a face I knew; I had grown up with his face on TV as a child, and all of a sudden, he was not there. This made me think that this was actually real; this was actually happening.

The following morning, she drove to a relief center and provided medical aid for more than a week. Kate was one of hundreds of volunteers who were motivated by a personal connection to either the victims or the communities devastated by the fires.

Second, members of the broader community often shared a common trade or profession with the fire victims and thus felt a desire to help a fellow member of their trade community because of direct alignment of needs with available skills and resources. For example, farmers from all over Australia sent supplies, materials, and offers to assist animals for fellow farmers (Judith Clements, Karleen Elledge). Similarly, members of the broader hotel community and affiliated associations shipped materials and collected donations for affected hotel owners (James Kennedy).

Third, many donors and volunteers were highly motivated to help because of national pride and sympathy for victims. This motivation is perhaps best captured by a revised version of Bruce Woodley's famous 1987 song "I Am Australian," which was performed two weeks after Black Saturday during a national memorial service and became a theme song for the relief effort. In introducing his song, Bruce Woodley explained to the audience of victims that this was a song of "hope and comfort for your weary hearts and for you to know that Australia is with you." An excerpt of the lyrics reads:

From the ashes of despair our towns will rise again!  
 We mourn your loss, we will rebuild. We are Australian!  
 We are one, but we are many  
 And from all the lands on earth we come  
 We share a dream and sing with one voice:  
 I am, you are, we are Australian!  
 We are one, we are many, we are Australian!

Finally, members of both the national and international community were motivated by a sense of altruism and sympathy for victims after viewing the extent of the devastation as portrayed in the media and by celebrities and response organizations (e.g., the Red Cross) and the Australian government. On realizing the incredible degree of devastation, individuals, organizations, and governments sought means to provide support.

### **The Importance of Local Nonphysical Resources**

The extensive involvement of and response from the broader community created an abundance of resources. In the context of a resource-poor local environment but an abundance of resources offered by people and organizations outside the local community, a significant issue developed: how to efficiently coordinate people and activities to quickly deliver the resources as customized products and services to ease victims' suffering. Spontaneous venturing offered a solution to this problem. This began with the recognition that though physical resources in the disaster zone had been destroyed, nonphysical resources had not, and so could provide the basis for spontaneous venturing.

**Spontaneous Venturing Based on Local Know-what** Actions were taken by local residents. Through the engagement of local actors, the spontaneous venturing processes were initiated and managed by indi-

viduals who were themselves victims, which facilitated the organizing of compassion. As victims themselves, members of the spontaneous ventures had deeper insight into what other (nonmember) victims were thinking and feeling, which translated directly into the customized development and rapid deployment of relief efforts that met local needs. Because needs were urgent, relief organizers had to “get it right” fast and early to be effective. Graeme Brown described how only by living through an event can one really understand the needs of others. Graeme’s sentiment was captured in the following news interview:

Graeme Brown, who lost his home, says the main problem is the emotional legacy of the tragedy and the personal trauma suffered by so many. “People haven’t just lost their houses, they’ve lost their whole lives—where they went to school, where they grew up, where they shopped. ... It’s all gone and people are really struggling with that.” [For this reason] Mr. Brown leads the Marysville [and] Triangle [Development] Group (MATDG), set up to ensure a community voice in the recovery process. (McKenzie 2009)

For victims like Graeme Brown, the suffering brought an acute understanding of how to organize an effort that addressed the various physical and emotional needs of those in the community. As a victim, Brown and other founding members of MATDG were able to offer a rapid and customized response to bushfires. Brown explained that immediately following the fires,

MATDG organised community meetings at the Marysville Golf Club, which helped us to get an idea of who needed help and exactly what it was that they needed. This led to the development of the temporary residential village in Marysville ... logistics—erecting marquees, distributing community notices, etc.—behind many of the funerals and memorial services which were held ... [and offering] counselling rooms in Taggerty where people could come and have a coffee and chat to a professional counsellor in private or just chat with other members of the community.

As victims, members of MATDG knew exactly what members of their community needed, therefore enabling a customized solution that could be delivered quickly (e.g., communication, memorial services, temporary housing) and could direct outside resources (e.g., placing counselors in the small community of Taggerty based on need).

Indeed, by being local, members of the spontaneous ventures knew the people who were victims, which gave them insights into what these victims had lost, what they were thinking, how they were feeling, and what they needed to help alleviate their suffering. Karleen Elledge

became the point of contact for locals, gathering knowledge pertaining to victim needs that was then translated into the customized bundling and delivery of goods. She described the experience this way:

After a few days, we also started getting phone calls from people who needed help. Baw Shire Council started calling us every hour on the hour to give us a list of people needing help. The Victorian Farmers Federation, the Livestock Exchange, the Salvation Army, and Cardinia Shire Council were also sending people to us. Calls for help just started coming from everywhere. Because my phone was going mad, I arranged for my phone to be diverted to other phones. Cardinia Shire Council supplied us with disaster plan phones and an internet connection, and we ended up having seven full-time volunteers working at the Bayles CFA [Country Fire Authority] station on administrative jobs, including answering the diverted calls.

### **Spontaneous Venturing Based on Local Know-how and Know-who**

By being local, members of the spontaneous ventures knew which local people could help get things done. That is, they knew who had the skills to complete specific tasks. The fires burned areas that were rural and often difficult to navigate, making it challenging for outsiders to even understand where community members were, let alone how to rapidly deliver goods and services to address specific needs. To make matters worse, the landscape had been severely altered, which sometimes made it difficult even for local residents to recognize what remained of their community. One victim, Jacqueline Hainsworth, explained it this way:

When we got there, we found pretty much nothing. The whole street was rubble; it was just a moonscape. I'd driven that road for 10 years, but as we were driving up, I didn't know where I was. There were no landmarks because the houses and trees had all burned. At first, I couldn't work out which house was ours; they all looked the same.

Members of spontaneous ventures utilized local knowledge to overcome these obstacles, enabling the speedy customized delivery of critical resources to local victims. One spontaneous venture member, Anne Leadbetter, described the volunteers she utilized this way:

Volunteers ... were predominantly local people, some of whom had actually lost their own homes, who were well known to the community, and who had good local knowledge as well as the ability to communicate effectively with the very traumatised people who surged through the doors. As well, the volunteer staff acted as the link with the key agencies that arrived to help and provided relevant local knowledge. This local knowledge was particularly important when working with agencies as local volunteers had

local geographic knowledge (as well as knowledge of people and community connections). The geographic knowledge was vital as the maps in the Shire office were not entirely accurate for the whole of the Kinglake Ranges—I suspect there are very few maps in existence which are accurate for our area. Also, many roads have locally used names but have totally different “formal” names. For example, the Whittlesea-Kinglake Road is called Main Road by locals, the Heidelberg-Kinglake Road is referred to as the St. Andrews Road or Hurstbridge Road, and the Kinglake-Healesville Road is referred to as the Mt. Slide Road.

Local volunteers were critical to the success of this venture through providing the locally specific information needed to navigate routes, access affected areas, rescue victims, and render other needed services. Without this customized local knowledge, the delivery and deployment of outside resources would have been delayed, furthering victim suffering.

James Kennedy, another spontaneous venture member, turned to local residents with specific skill sets to coordinate recovery efforts and maintain the operations of his venture. He noted:

It became obvious to us very early that we needed somebody to coordinate the comings and goings at the hotel and to deal with the situation. We asked Joanne Kasch to coordinate the operations of what quickly became an unofficial relief centre. The place was in disarray, and we were struggling to cope with the situation. Over the coming weeks, Joanne did an outstanding job in assisting us with the maintenance of the hotel—cleaning sheets, etc.—coordinating the delivery of supplies and donations and liaising with all of the suppliers who helped us.

Kennedy was able to rapidly access the local human capital needed to run the operation. His knowledge of victims’ needs as well as the customized skill set required to accomplish the venture’s mission furthered the relief of victim suffering.

As another example, the MATDG venture was able to connect individuals in the community to rapidly address an incredible variety of needs that only local residents were capable of both understanding and fulfilling. Bruce Ackerman, a local plumber and member of the MATDG venture, proved to have the local skills needed to rapidly deliver customized solutions both in the immediate and the long term. A reporter explained his interview with Bruce:

For eight days after the fire, Ackerman told me, he had helped the police as they searched for bodies in collapsed houses. During a fire, he explained, people usually take shelter in the bathroom: “And who would know where the bathroom is? The plumber.” Thirty-nine people in Marysville lost their



lives; Ackerman's neighbors Liz Fiske and her son were among the dead. ... While we drove around the town, Ackerman's phone rang constantly. It sometimes seemed that there was little in the town that he wasn't doing. He had helped reinstate water service, refilling the depleted reservoir. He was head of a committee to establish a temporary village nearby to house residents who were rebuilding their homes. That morning, he had dug a grave. (Kenneally 2009: 56)

Sometimes spontaneous entrepreneurial actions were not so much the result of entrepreneurs' know-how as the result of tapping into others' know-how and connections:

I learnt that the essential element of sustainable recovery is to find and engage with the strengths and networks that existed in a community before the disaster. Every community has something that works for them and that they value. It is worth taking the time to identify and connect with those networks and to build on the pre-existing strengths wherever possible, and that is what we tried to do in those first weeks. It's hard to imagine how you would facilitate recovery without understanding what was valued before. To do otherwise runs the risk of defining the community by its emergency rather than by the great things that usually happen there. (Anne Leadbeater)

**Spontaneous Venturing Based on Real-Time Information** Because of the prominent role she played in her local community, shortly after the fire, Karleen Elledge began receiving calls from neighbors needing assistance and later from organizations that recognized she was a legitimate contact to supply important resources to relieve others' suffering. In turn, Karleen's knowledge of the local community enabled her to coordinate the prompt acquisition, bundling, and delivery of resources that were highly customized to victims' specific needs. Karleen then shared this knowledge with outside volunteers by giving them customized "delivery sheets" for needy individuals. She explained that "volunteer drivers were given delivery sheets and would drive through the yard and stop at the various stations, picking up what they needed to deliver." Furthermore, Karleen's knowledge of local needs allowed her to customize delivery by directly matching donors with victims, which she accomplished by "arranging for a donation to be picked up and taken straight to a farmer," for example (Karleen Elledge). This process not only allowed for accuracy in meeting specific needs but also created a fluid logistical flow, ensuring goods were delivered rapidly. The victims greatly appreciated this personalized attention as each had specific needs many outsiders would not necessarily understand. One victim, Michelle Buntine, explained as follows:

Karleen arranged for teams to go out to our property and help. They helped us clean up the wire off the ground and what was left of the old fence posts. Karleen also sent a team of women out to look under the roof of my house and go through the rubble. At the time, I didn't want to know about it; I just wanted to get rid of it. I thought that if it was out of my sight, then it would be out of my mind. I am grateful that they went through the rubble because now I have a crate of things that they salvaged. No one else would know what they were, but I know that a certain blob was that ornament and that another blob was my jewellery. What Karleen provided was really practical. When you haven't lost any family members or your pets but you have lost your house, it is practical assistance that you need most. I think the assistance provided by Karleen is why our community is so far ahead compared to other communities that are rebuilding. It has been very effective. It was due to Karleen. She has her own cleaning business, which she shut down while she was doing this.

As locals, spontaneous entrepreneurs had real-time information, which enabled them to adapt responses to be more effective at alleviating suffering. Anne Leadbeater explained:

Listening to the community and tailoring our information to the questions asked also meant that the complexity of the information kept pace with the recovery. For example, on the first day, we were talking about water and fuel. By the ninth day, we were talking about Worksafe and tax issues for small business.

One spontaneous entrepreneur, Vicki Ruhr, noted that being a local meant that she was a good "ear," and as a result, she was the source of information about how other locals were doing in the aftermath of the disaster:

I have also worked with a lot of people in the community who are involved in health and well-being. Since the fires, I have continued to work alongside health care professional and psychologists in Kinglake to assist people in dealing with the physical and psychological impacts of the bushfires. From carrying out this work, I have realised that full recovery for the people in our community will take a very long time. Our community is pretty stuffed. ... Since moving to Eltham, I have had a lot of people from the Kinglake community come to see me, seeking support and assistance in the recovery process, including friends, associates, and people who knew me as someone who was quite involved in the Kinglake community prior to the fire. These people have either not had case workers or have not had satisfactory experiences with the case workers who were appointed to them. In addition to listening to them, I have passed on a lot of information to people about how to go about claiming insurance, rebuilding, and making claims with the compensation fund. I have been able to be a sort of referral service for information and a point of contact for people in the community.

**Spontaneous Venturing Based on Local Word-of-Mouth** By being local, members of the spontaneous ventures who started something that was valued found that word of mouth about their actions snowballed rapidly through the local network because it came from a trusted source—a fellow local resident. Furthermore, because of their credibility in the local network, members of spontaneous ventures also caught the attention of nonlocal donors looking for the most useful places to invest their time and money to support the relief effort. What made members of spontaneous ventures so helpful was their knowledge of how to deliver goods rapidly to affected areas and where the greatest need was in order to communicate and target locally customized needs. This was the case for Karleen Elledge and was a primary reason she was able to bundle goods customized to specific needs while providing speedy delivery despite the difficult environment:

On 8 February 2009, I went to the general store in Bayles to get a few things, and some people came up to me and asked what had happened and how they could help. When I returned home, Mick and I decided that we would try and get together some hay and fencing gear for some of the local farmers in Laber-touche and surrounding areas. We made up a flyer, with my mobile phone number printed on it, asking people to donate spare feed or fencing materials and took that down to the general store. I also e-mailed a copy of the flyer to a business associate. ... My e-mail went through the Shire and it just kept rolling—it even ended up overseas in places as far away as America. By 10 February 2009, my phone was going nuts—hundreds of people were offering to make donations. At that time, we started transforming the Bayles CFA station into a relief centre. ... What started off as a simple flyer just took on a life of its own, and it snowballed into something huge, which I never anticipated.

For this venture, the snowball effect of the venture allowed for an even more efficient (in customization and delivery time) alleviation of victim suffering by enabling the coordination of donors' and deliverers' efforts as they addressed specific local needs.

Another example demonstrating word of mouth about spontaneous ventures' action *and* value snowballing is the MATDG venture. As one of their initiatives, MATDG members utilized a local golf club that had been damaged as a community gathering point. Immediately after the fire, community members were drawn to the golf club for meetings, communication updates, and support in planning next steps. This early sentiment was captured in a news report:

It (the Marysville Golf Club) survived a firestorm that annihilated almost everything else in its path. And now, by default, the Marysville golf and bowls

club commands a new status in the community. “Fortuitously or otherwise, the golf club is one of the only facilities left standing in the district,” club president (and MATDG member) Doug Walter told a public meeting (of 300 locals) at the clubhouse last night. “I want to tell you tonight that this will be the new hub of the community,” he declared to loud applause. “Bugger golf, to hell with bowls. No longer will this club be dedicated to golf, but to the community.” (Ricketson 2009)

MATDG’s local presence allowed the venture to draw in community members; listen to their needs; and deliver key services, such as communications, shelter, and emotional support in the immediate aftermath of the bushfire. In the early days following the fire,

[The club was] integral in keeping the community together since Black Saturday, and all major community meetings and government services have been delivered from the clubhouse. Club president Doug Walter said it really was the “guts of the town,” and he was looking forward to the golf club providing more sporting opportunities to the community, as well as performing arts and accommodation. (Pattison-Sowden 2009)

As with the Bayles Relief Centre directed by Karleen Elledge, MATDG’s work at the Marysville Golf Club rapidly snowballed, first through the community and later by coming to national and international attention as a project addressing the evolving needs of the community by transitioning from emergency response to rebuilding. On one occasion, MATDG was approached by Australia’s wealthiest miner, Andrew Forrest, the actor Russell Crowe, and the golfer and golf course designer Greg Norman with donations of both time and money to rebuild the course and set the community back on the path to “normal.” Doug Walter explained it this way:

They asked me what the club needs, and Greg Norman said “How would you like a Greg Norman golf course (valued at \$2 million just for the design)?” in that American accent of his. I said, “Shucks, yes please!” We want to attract people to the area, give them somewhere to stay, something to do, and go into town to buy meals—it really is a catalyst project to get the district going again. (Pattison-Sowden 2009)

He later added, “Crikey! This is going to give people a serious boost” (Rintoul 2009).

A final example of how word of mouth about spontaneous venturing efforts snowballed rapidly is the Gold Coast Getaway, a venture created to give people a therapeutic vacation (i.e., taking a holiday to relax, receive counseling from psychologists, and listen to inspiring stories from motivational speakers). Bruce Morrow began simply

wondering how he could help the fire-ravaged community of Marysville even after losing “all 12 of our buildings, including the family home and the partly renovated bed and breakfast cottage” (Bruce Morrow). Again, like the other ventures, his actions started locally and eventually garnered the attention and donations of nonlocal people and organizations. He explained it this way:

It started with a few phone calls to local companies to see if they could assist, and it’s ballooned out to what we think will be a full-blown adventure the children will never forget. We’ve been fortunate enough to receive some huge contributions from Australian companies who have made this trip possible. You can really see the spirit of Australia coming together for these kids. It’s going to be an amazing experience. (Lewis 2009)

As a local resident, Bruce was able to recognize the unique needs in the community, gather resources, and rapidly deliver services that addressed those needs.

Indeed, word-of-mouth spread not only among the victims but also to outsiders, such as Judith Clements, who wanted to help:

We started off with local farmers. ... We thought that we would cover the Whittlesea, Upper Plenty, Humevale, Strathewen, Kinglake, and Kinglake West areas, but we ended up covering a much larger area (as the effort grew); we also got feed to Flowerdale, Strath Creek, Glenburn, and the Yarra Valley. Transport companies got involved, and we were getting phone offers of assistance from all over Victoria, little towns between Ceduna and Port Augusta in South Australia, and Toowoomba and Charlton in Queensland.

**Spontaneous Venturing Based on “Being Local”** By being local, members of the spontaneous ventures were able to communicate with victims, especially because, as we found, victims are often inclined not to listen to nonlocals. Communicating with those affected by the fires played a large role in developing customized solutions for victims and in delivering those solutions when and where victims needed them most. For example, one victim explained the following:

If this ever happens again, the community has to make decisions. People outside just don’t get it. Everyone had networks going; we were doing a good job. Then the department came and started making it harder. This caused more suffering. You have to allow the people in the local community to step up and take on leadership roles. ... Natural leaders should be employed. They already know the people in the community. They’re already doing it. (Borrell, Vella, and Lane 2011: 72)

Local leaders were effective because they understood local needs, conducted customized relief efforts that efficiently met those needs, and understood how to communicate with victims to assess ongoing needs. As suggested by Graeme Brown, they understood the terrain and were therefore able to act quickly and precisely in addressing victim suffering. In contrast, support programs engineered by nonlocal groups were viewed as overly generalized, alien, time-consuming, and not fit for the particular needs of the various communities affected by the fires, and in some cases they were seen as exacerbating the problem. The benefit of local community leaders, according to Graeme Brown, is that they have

extremely effective and reliable communication skills; the ability to move through the “red tape of government” to get things done in accordance with the needs of the community; and the ability to strengthen and enable all people involved in the recovery process at all levels of government, industry. ... As a person affected by the bushfires, it seems as though the rest of the world is being normal and it has a conventional [non-locally focused] way of doing things.

**Spontaneous Venturing Generating a Sense of Urgency and Cohesion** As local residents themselves, members of the spontaneous ventures were closest to victim needs and thus generated action and urgency among other local residents, as well as among willing outside donors looking to help. With resources coming in from a variety of sources and victims urgently needing resources to address needs, spontaneous venture members were able to rapidly receive, bundle, and deliver resources. Judith Clements explained her experience:

As the enormity of the disaster became clear, the next day we began to think about the recovery. My father and I were discussing how farming communities often rally to get fodder and assistance to farmers affected by fire or other disasters and thought that we’d better get the process going. It started off quite simply: I called a few farmers to see what was required and found out that about 10 of the 30 [farmers] were affected significantly. As I realised over the next hours just how enormous the need was, I asked Peter Towt, a neighbouring farmer, to get involved because I knew that I couldn’t handle it on my own. From that point on, what we thought was going to be a few days of coordinating fodder assistance turned into six weeks of full-time work. We worked fairly closely with the DPI—they had imposed a four-week time limit on the emergency assistance, but we kept it going for another couple of weeks because, in many cases, it was days and weeks before people began to emerge to seek assistance. ... Our role was to organise the distribution. ... We couldn’t keep up with calls that were coming in directly. We were calling on friends to help

and even agricultural machinery dealers donated tractors for unloading and loading fodder [to handle the calls]. ... We were getting a lot of calls directly and decided to send vehicles directly into the areas to save duplication of handling—because unloading and reloading a semi-trailer takes a lot of effort. ... We made sure that we had a volunteer to escort trucks through the road blocks so that we could distribute the fodder directly instead of unloading it onto one of our own vehicles.

As members of the local community, Judith and her colleagues were able to (1) start a recovery effort in the immediate aftermath of the fire that was customized to local needs and (2) ensure the effort was as efficient and as speedy as possible, going so far as to connect donors directly with victims. This unique ability to both understand specific local needs and coordinate access to the external resource-rich environment was critical for the venture's success in alleviating suffering.

As another example, the re-Growth Pods venture generated an incredible sense of urgency regarding the housing crisis that victims experienced following the disaster. With fires continuing to threaten their properties, those affected were faced with the choice of either abandoning their homes or finding a way to live on their properties without guarantees of key resources, including shelter, food, water, and communication with the outside world (Doug Walter, Juliet Moore). One person who chose to stay explained the situation this way: "In the first week after the fire, there was nothing; we had to do it all ourselves. We couldn't get out, and if you got out, you couldn't get back in again" (Ross 2009). While temporary government housing solutions took six to eight months to come to fruition, re-Growth Pods, prefabricated shelters that can be delivered quickly to disaster zones and used as long-term housing, more rapidly met the needs of victims. Juliet Moore noted, "The re-Growth Pod was delivered to the property of my neighbours, Jacqueline Marchant and Stoney Black, just before Easter. It had taken six weeks from concept to getting it on site." While this delivery was incredibly rapid, the pod could have been delivered even more rapidly had it not been for outside obstacles, as Juliet explained:

We did have all sorts of issues getting [the pod] on site, and this made me aware of what issues everyone faced. We weren't supposed to put it on the site until the site was cleared although we weren't obstructing the block [i.e., land] at all. We also had to wait to get clearance from the coroner. Then there was dealing with council in regard to what we need in the way of permits.

Despite these obstacles, re-Growth Pods was able to generate a sense of urgency to deliver critical services months ahead of other attempts to provide a housing solution.



As soon as Juliet Moore came up with an idea that could relieve others' suffering, she acted, realizing the needs people faced while trying to stay on their property to consider their rebuilding options. She described it this way:

I took two big A1 boards with the designs up to the Kinglake relief centre, and I started to talk to people about it. I also had a film production company contact who wanted to make a documentary of the pod concept. The whole thing sort of grew from there. ... I wasn't aware of any real opposition to what we were doing because, at that point, there weren't really any formalised solutions. ... I don't think anyone has fully grasped the extent of what it means to rebuild this community.

### **Local Emergent Actions**

In the context of the bushfires, local ventures relied heavily on local nonphysical resources as well as on residual local and newly acquired external physical resources to enable local emergent actions that could overcome the numerous impediments to compassion organizing for the alleviation of suffering. These local emergent actions included creating emergent community roles, improvising locally to connect, and introducing symbolic actions of community.

### **Creating Emergent Community Roles**

Overcoming impediments to collecting and delivering outside resources to relieve victim suffering required venturing to create and fill new community roles. Our findings indicate that three emergent roles that combined behaviors, tasks, and desired outcomes were created for compassion organizing that did not exist in the local communities before the fires: community representative, community healer, and community rebuilder.

### **Spontaneous Venturing to Represent or Coordinate the Community**

MATDG members expressed the need to "have a community group to represent and work for the communities" (Judith Frazer-Jans), and the venture created a new role to meet this need. According to MATDG documents, the specific roles of this new venture included "(1) [providing] consultation and communication, (2) [providing] initiative(s) from the community not above it, (3) aim[ing] for 'better' rather than for 'replacement,' and (4) build[ing] confidence and hence build[ing] [community] aspirations" (MATDG meeting notes). This community group

“worked very well” (Boston Consulting Group 2009; Judith Frazer-Jans), successfully connecting locals and coordinating action not only to understand specific needs but also to identify and obtain tailored resources that could address those needs in the most efficient manner. For example, Graeme Brown noted the following:

Since the bushfires, I have been actively involved in the Marysville and Triangle Development Group (which is known as MATDG or “Mat Dog”). I was a founding member of the group, and I am currently its president. ... MATDG was never intended to be a decision-making body—its purpose has always been to draw the community together and to be a voice for the community ... as the community reference committee.

In the same way, other local residents served as representatives for smaller communities (Karleen Elledge, Jim Kennedy), frequently functioning as coordinators connecting community members to resources and delivering customized supplies and services. Karleen Elledge, for instance, held a prominent role in her community before the bushfires (she owned a local maid service and served on the local rural firefighting brigade), which enabled her to build trust with community members. As a result, after the fires, she received calls from local people for assistance, and later, larger organizations began contacting her to supply important resources because they recognized her as a legitimate referee in her community. In addition, Karleen’s localized knowledge enabled her to quickly acquire, bundle, and distribute important resources that were highly customized to victim needs. Karleen was then able to transfer this knowledge to outside volunteers through a customized resource distribution process, which included providing volunteers with personalized “delivery sheets” for individuals needing help, matching donors and victims directly, and “arranging for a donation to be picked up [from the supplier] and taken straight to a farmer” (Karleen Elledge). This process made the acquisition and delivery of important resources both fast and customized.

In addition, it appeared important that these leadership roles emerged from within the local community rather than outside it:

If this ever happens again, the community has to make decisions. People outside just don’t get it. Everyone had networks going; we were doing a good job. Then the department came and started making it harder. This caused more suffering. You have to allow the people in the local community to step up and take on leadership roles. ... Natural leaders should be employed. They already know the people in the community. They’re already doing it. (Borrell, Vella, and Lane 2011: 72)

**Spontaneous Venturing to Heal a Community** In addition to their coordination roles, many local venture members also served as community healers (Karleen Elledge, Judith Clements, Jim Kennedy, Bruce Morrow). As described above, people who started ventures to relieve suffering harnessed their local networks to rapidly connect with victims, ascertain their specific circumstances and needs, and deploy customized solutions. Specifically, the community healers alleviated suffering by helping victims heal from physical injury (Lachlan Fraser), emotional trauma (Bruce Morrow, Jim Kennedy), and grief over property damage and loss (Karlee Elledge, Judith Clements). For example, soon after the fires, Judith Clements realized that lost fencing put an overwhelming “burden on farmers” in her community and immediately took action by starting a venture that organized fencing for those who most needed it. While Judith helped farmers overcome obvious physical needs, she also enabled victims to begin healing because subsequent crises, such as inability to hold or care for livestock, were prevented.

Bruce Morrow—another local resident who was initially called Black Saturday’s “biggest loser” because of his loss of twelve properties, including his home—became a community healer in his area. “After recognising many in the community needed to ‘get away’” to begin healing from the devastation, Bruce came up with idea of providing community members therapeutic holidays to Australia’s beach communities, getaways that included access to counseling and recreational outings. As he noted, “I wanted to use some of my skills to benefit the community rather than just my immediate family.”

**Spontaneous Venturing to Rebuild Community** Community rebuilders played a critical role in helping victims move past initial survival and toward an envisioned future. For instance, after narrowly escaping his burning home just days earlier, Lachlan Fraser started organizing a venture to establish and run a marathon festival in his community. Lachlan wanted to “bring people back to Marysville. He wanted to be sure the town and surrounding communities got the support they needed to get back on their feet. ... [The marathon was designed] to be here for the long haul, just like those from Marysville and surrounding communities would be as they rebuilt their homes and the community” (Fraser 2009). Lachlan knew that one of the best ways to help residents recover was to reenergize tourism, the primary if not sole local economic stimulus, and he was able to rapidly plan

and deploy a solution for doing that, thereby making a substantial contribution to the rebuilding effort.

### **Improvising Locally to Connect**

After the disaster, there was widespread disruption of individuals' daily lives and of existing community routines, communication channels, delivery modes, and other infrastructure elements. As a result, new ventures had to quickly develop novel solutions to connect people with the resources they needed. According to one community member, Doug Walter, "Most of the rapid [and customized] responses [came] from ... the community itself." Four themes emerged during our research related to local ventures' improvisation after the bushfires to facilitate compassion organizing: communication methods, logistics, community reconstruction strategies, and bricolage.

### **Spontaneous Ventures Improvised to Develop Communication Methods**

After many traditional communication channels were destroyed, venturing locals developed new communication methods to connect with neighbors as well as with resource providers and friends and family outside the affected area. Jim Kennedy, for instance, developed several ways to communicate within and outside the disaster area, including a workaround to get phone service:

We found that we could receive limited mobile phone reception near the summit of nearby Mount Gordon, so for about two weeks after 7 February 2009, I went up there every day for about two hours so that I could communicate with the outside world and organise fresh supplies for the hotel.

Even with this plan, however, Jim's calls were often ignored, causing him to improvise again:

Out of desperation, I spoke to my daughter-in-law (who lives in suburban Melbourne) by mobile phone from Mount Gordon about a week after 7 February 2009 and asked her to contact the media to ask them to report that people were in Narbethong and needing help. She did that, and I understand that our situation was reported on ABC radio by Jon Faine and on 3AW by Neil Mitchell. This prompted swift action from the authorities.

Another improvised solution Jim implemented was daily community meetings at his hotel to communicate with local people who had no contact with the outside world owing to roadblocks or downed power lines. The meetings were a key venue for police, government workers, and other knowledgeable authorities to provide local resi-

dents with important information after the disaster. Improvised communication means like these helped establish or reestablish connections between people, enabling the community to overcome problems associated with disrupted routines and disabled infrastructure as well as the resulting suffering, which inhibited both speedy and customized resource delivery.

Organizing regular meetings was also important to communicate the nature of the situation and the response. According to Anne Leadbeater:

We settled into a pattern that seemed to be working well. ... [We set up meetings at which] we would begin by asking the CFA to update us on what was happening locally. ... Then it would generally be the police and then DHS, Centrelink, Red Cross, paramedics, DPI, and the RSPCA. In the first few days, we would talk about the continuing fire threat, water deliveries and material aid, counselling, dangerous trees, grants, avoiding asbestos and other hazards—whatever information needed to be conveyed. ... A regular visible presence was incredibly important. People said to me afterwards that this had made such a difference.

**Spontaneous Ventures Improved Logistics** In addition to communication improvisation, members of local ventures also improvised in developing logistical processes to connect the supply of resources with victims' demand. For instance, Karleen Elledge detailed the complicated process her venture triggered to help local farmers refence their properties, which was a critical need for them:

We had 642 volunteers work for us during those three weeks [of refencing]. It was an enormous logistical exercise, but I organized the volunteers a bit like a CFA [rural fire] brigade with "strike teams" and each volunteer designated to a particular team. We had a team sheet, so I knew exactly who was on what team, where they were going, and what they were doing.

Within weeks of the fire, Karleen and her team were able to quickly refence more than seventy properties using this process. Additionally, as this example shows, Karleen was also able to customize her workforce to meet specific refencing needs, pairing volunteers with particular projects based on their skill sets to avoid any additional damage.

Venturing locals also had to improvise in crafting logistics to overcome barriers caused by the command-and-control system set up by outside (i.e., nonlocal) organizations:

The difficulties that we encountered with getting food and fuel through the roadblocks were problems we faced every day. ... We eventually found the best

way to get through the roadblocks was to bypass the formal channels of control. (Peter Szepe)

[Our local experts were] going into the bush [to] do the road clearing and access work, but the police turned them away at a roadblock. ... [These local residents] just drove around them, rather than argue ... mov[ing] through the “red tape of government” to get things done in accordance with the needs of the community. (Graeme Brown)

**Spontaneous Ventures Improvised to Develop Community Reconstruction Strategies** Venturing locals also improvised in designing, developing, and executing community reconstruction strategies to keep community members connected to each other and to their land as well as to “build back better.” Some locals responded to the aftermath of the fire with linear planning solutions, first developing a plan and then following the plan with action. However, others planned and acted simultaneously, which led to “unconventional means to address an unconventional circumstance” (Graeme Brown). The MATDG group was very agile in the aftermath of the fires, continually and creatively improvising in their use of the club to rebuild and meet community needs. Further, as Juliet Moore recounted, community members realized how important it was for the rebuilding effort to begin internally, and they knew that not only did this effort require action but that they had it in them to rebuild:

I have a lot of admiration for their attitude towards the rebuilding process, which is “If it’s going to happen, we’ve got to do it, because we can’t expect someone else to do it, and if we talk about it, it’s not going to happen, and if we open it up to community discussion, we’ll just get 5,000 opinions and arguments, so we’ll just do it.”

**Spontaneous Ventures Engaged in Bricolage** The above improvisations mainly helped new ventures overcome barriers to compassion organizing aimed at connecting nonlocal resources to local victims; however, venturing locals also engaged in *bricolage* to create new bundles of local resources to alleviate community members’ suffering. Bricolage is a resource acquisition approach whereby individuals make “do by applying combinations of the resources at hand [including human resources] to new problems and opportunities” (Baker and Nelson 2005: 333; see also Baker, Miner, and Eesley 2003; Magni et al. 2009) rather than obtaining new resources. While a bricolage strategy can be either planned or improvised (Baker, Miner, and Eesley 2003), a

great deal of improvisational bricolage facilitated resource solutions for emergent actors after Black Saturday. Jim Kennedy, for instance, engaged in bricolage by utilizing his hotel staff as well as other resources at his disposal to create new resource combinations for locals, including new roles, new processes, and new “products,” all of which were essential to keeping his new “unofficial relief center” running.

### **Introducing Symbolic Actions of Community**

As is the case with most disasters, the Black Saturday bushfires caused a great deal of psychological suffering among local people. In response, many spontaneous ventures took innovative symbolic actions to help victims deal with and overcome their feelings of loneliness, helplessness, uncertainty, and anxiety.

**Spontaneous Ventures Communicated Belongingness** First, many ventures helped instill a sense of belonging in the community, thus lessening victims’ feelings of loneliness. For example, MATDG did so through a public statement: “Don’t give up hope—there’s a lot of us in the same boat. ... I’m sure we can do it. Stay positive” (Mann 2009; see also Kissane 2009; Perkins 2009).

**Spontaneous Ventures Communicated Agency** Members of spontaneous ventures also took symbolic actions to communicate community agency, thus lessening feelings of helplessness and indicating to community members that they were capable of regaining control over their lives and dignity. For example, although Lachlan Fraser lost his medical clinic and home in the fires, he still managed to take action to unite his community, which communicated agency: “As an ultra-marathon runner, I determined in that first week that we must have our own marathon in defiance of the calamity that overwhelmed us” (Fraser 2009). Lachlan, the town doctor, experienced some of the most devastating parts of the disaster, including having to identify friends’ remains, undergoing surgery and hospitalization to treat a severe injury he sustained while fighting the fires, and coping with the emotions from having lost so much. As he explained to a news reporter, “The only memento [I] found from [my] home is a Swiss cow bell, lying under ash about 10m from where it once hung in the kitchen. ... [Marysville] is this lonely, grey, ash landscape. It’s like a nuclear bomb has hit. And this cow bell keeps ringing. It’s like *For Whom the Bell Tolls*” (Carlyon 2009). While still suffering himself, however, Lachlan was able to draw



on these difficult experiences to promote healing through his new venture. He eventually used the recovered cowbell to begin the first Marysville Marathon (Fraser 2009), an act that symbolized how he and the community were taking back control to overcome the disaster.

Although these communications seemed to create a stark divide between local and nonlocal people, the distinction was important in motivating local residents to act to maintain the notion of community:

In a sense it's an empowering thing to stare into the abyss. Everything else must be bearable because we wore that. ... We [as locals] have to forge a new sense of ourselves. I know that we will be OK. (Kissane 2009)

**Spontaneous Ventures Communicated a Positive Vision of the Future** Venturing local residents also took symbolic actions to communicate a positive envisioned community future, thereby decreasing anxiety about the current state of suffering. As might be expected after any disaster, the first step to recovery for many community members affected by the fires was dealing with the early traumas associated with the postdisaster environment (Graeme Brown, Ann Leadbeater, Jim Kennedy). Many community members needed strength and support to make sense of what had occurred and begin to move forward. In this context, symbolic actions that emphasized the community's ability to endure (Graeme Brown), survive (Jim Kennedy), and overcome the worst of it (Doug Walter) prepared community members to take subsequent actions to rebuild. For example, after the fires, 150 individuals stranded in Narbethong reached out for help, only to have nonlocal aid organizations respond by saying, "But there's nobody in Narbethong" (Doherty 2009a). To take action and inspire community members, Jim Kennedy converted the Black Spur Inn "into a massive open house and base for relief efforts" (Brumby 2009) and erected a sign outside the inn that read, "Take heart, the sun will still shine tomorrow" (Doherty 2009a). These actions helped decrease some of the community's stress and anxiety as well as reassure locals that they would indeed persevere. Similarly, Graeme Brown communicated his confidence in the community's strength and resilience by taking actions to empower people "to get their lives back on track" (Graeme Brown, cited in Milovanovic 2009).

**Spontaneous Ventures Communicated Community Recovery** Members of local ventures took symbolic actions to communicate community recovery and show community members they had the strength

to rebuild, thereby helping lessen individuals' uncertainty about the future (Mann 2009; Milovanovic 2009; Tomazin 2009). Venturing local residents' symbolic actions were helpful in generating a path forward to rebuild as community members eventually began realizing that the worst was behind them and that they would recover. For example, Juliet Moore quickly recognized an urgent need to provide shelter for people who wished to remain on their property while rebuilding, and she immediately acted to make her idea reality. Moore's idea—the re-Growth Pod—is a prefabricated shelter that can be quickly delivered to a disaster area to provide immediate safe shelter for victims. Individuals can use the pod as longer-term stand-alone housing or they can turn it into the core of a more extensive shelter. As such, the dwelling not only meets immediate shelter needs, it can also serve as a structural foundation for continuing construction and development.

Similarly, others explained that despite the difficulties it faced, the community itself wanted to serve as the epicenter of the recovery, both symbolically and practically. In an interview with a news reporter, Nora Spitzer stated:

This community-recovery message was also targeted at outsiders: The tourists aren't here, and we've had nowhere to operate from. ... But we're determined to rebuild. I do believe Marysville will come back. (Legg 2010)

Similarly, Doug Walters, a local victim-responder, was quoted in a news story as saying:

We want to attract people to the area, give them somewhere to stay, something to do, and go into town to buy meals—it really is a catalyst project to get the district going again. (quoted in Pattison-Sowden 2009)

### **Duration of Spontaneous Venturing**

Temporary organizations can occur within established (i.e., permanent) organizations (e.g., Bakker 2010; Engwall 2003; Sydow and Staber 2002), through joint collaboration among a number of permanent organizations (Kenis, Janowicz-Panjaitan, and Cambre 2009), or without any direct relationship with a parent organization (Lundin and Söderholm 1995). While the length of the operating term of a temporary organization is often known from the beginning (Goodman and Goodman 1976; Grabher 2002a, 2002b; Meyerson, Weick, and Kramer 1996), this may not always be the case. Indeed, with temporary organizations responding to a disaster, little is known *ex ante* (e.g., Drabek and McEntire 2003; Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001; Tierney and

Trainor 2004), for such ventures operate in environments characterized by high uncertainty as well as great urgency and the need to constantly adapt to new information about victim suffering or resource availability (Drabek and McEntire 2003; Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa, and Hollingshead 2007). Without preexisting structures (e.g., teams, tasks, and roles), without knowledge of the extent of victim suffering, and without knowledge of available resources, it is difficult to anticipate the duration (i.e., life span) of such temporary organizations upon creation.

Four of the eight spontaneous ventures we studied in depth no longer exist (they were temporary), and those that remain have a significantly different role in their respective communities than they did immediately after the disaster. Rather than disbanding because of failure—that is, “the termination of an initiative to create organizational value that has fallen short of its goals” (Shepherd, Patzelt, and Wolfe 2011: 1229)—their disbanding was the result of the successful fulfillment of their mission to alleviate suffering during the critical time of supply-demand disequilibrium.

Our comparison of temporary spontaneous ventures with those that persisted revealed four primary themes. First, temporary spontaneous ventures focused *exclusively* on alleviating the suffering of victims. Although persisting spontaneous ventures also started this way, a hybrid business model emerged. The hybrid business model accommodated an economic element to a longer-term social mission. For example, temporary initiatives, including the opening of impromptu relief centers, lasted only a matter of weeks, fulfilling the critical needs of the community until established organizations could “catch up.” As Karleen Elledge explained, “After running the relief centre for about three weeks ... I knew that it was our time to pull out. ... We eventually closed down our relief centre and transported our remaining donated supplies” to a new, government-sponsored relief center. In contrast, MATDG continues to operate as it plays a more long-term role in full-scale recovery, and the continuing leadership gap in their community causes an ongoing need. The group continues to be active in facilitating community activities, replanting vegetation, lobbying state and federal governments for funding, communicating community needs, and generating a plan for the rebirth of the community. These are important activities, but not all are now directed toward alleviating victim suffering.

Second, temporary spontaneous ventures focused on alleviating the *most urgent and fundamental* causes of suffering. For example, the

Whittlesea Farm Relief venture delivered feed and water for animals to limit the ongoing damage and loss of life produced by the fires, and the Black Spur Relief Centre provided the sole source of food and water for stranded inhabitants and relief workers. These causes of suffering, while highly damaging, were relatively short-lived because the ventures were so successful. For example, the Whittlesea Farm Relief venture lasted only six weeks because it was so successful at meeting the community's needs.

Third, temporary spontaneous ventures relied on an *exhaustible resource source* from the external environment. For example, Karleen Elledge explained how she had a limited "source" of hours she could commit to the effort:

I closed my cleaning business for about three weeks while I spent all of my time at the relief centre. I hadn't planned on setting up this massive big thing, but it became a massive big thing. Some of my employees were able to continue their regular jobs, but otherwise, they told me that they understood why the business needed to close.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, persisting spontaneous ventures transitioned to more reliable supply sources. For example, the Marysville Marathon Festival sought long-term sponsorships to underwrite an annual event that could remind the outside community of ongoing needs, procure donations for needy families, and continue to rebuild the culture of the devastated region, which relies heavily on tourism and visitors to sustain the community. Similarly, repurposed networks reverted back to their previous use but with noted changes to be even more effective in the future. For example, the Taggerty Heights "Dad's Army" was determined to be even more effective in the future in preparing to respond to bushfires and support neighbors. Doug Walter described his plans this way:

I believe that our neighbourhood group structure was very successful in a time of emergency. The key to our success was our ability to communicate by radio when all other means of communication had failed and that we were able to work cooperatively. This idea could be expanded throughout Victoria. I have drafted a local area emergency model. ... If another repeater station were built, it would ensure neighbouring groups could communicate with one another to ensure wider cooperation and support. There are now other groups in Murrindindi Shire which are looking to replicate our arrangement.

Finally, temporary spontaneous ventures stepped up to fill in when established organizations were unable to meet victims' needs. When

the local conditions improved, established organizations were sufficiently caught up to efficiently provide the products and services (mostly services) needed. For example, local relief centers provided immediate care until state- or federally run relief centers were able to take over. Because the fire covered such a large region, it simply took time for government-sponsored responders to reach everyone. Additionally, once roads were reopened, the traditional infrastructure for feed and hay distribution was once more operable, enabling access to infrastructure that had been temporarily disabled. In contrast, the persisting spontaneous ventures developed unique products that differentiated them from established organizations and were able to develop routines for efficient business operations. For example, the re-Growth Pod provided both immediate relief to fire victims and a longer-term solution for the unique customer base living in the Bushland (many individuals build their own homes or add on to existing structures over time). The short- and long-term value of the venture was described this way in a news report:

It's a fantastic concept. What more could people ask for? [It is] a simple, quick-fix building, connected to your existing septic. It's move in, start living straight away. ... The re-Growth Pod is not a temporary building, and the beauty of it is that when you are ready to rebuild, you can simply add what you want ... [as] the pod is made from totally non-combustible materials and would give protection in a bushfire. (Ross 2009)

## Discussion

This chapter has explored how ventures spontaneously formed to alleviate the suffering of victims in the aftermath of a natural disaster, thereby extending thinking beyond the traditional views of disaster response, organizing compassion, and organizational emergence. We found that ventures immediately formed in the aftermath of a natural disaster to address both temporary and long-term community needs, providing a spontaneous view of organizational emergence. In this chapter, we suggested that one reason for the emergence of spontaneous venturing as a means of organizing compassion after a natural disaster is what could be described as a resource-asymmetry problem: extreme resource scarcity at the local level coupled with resource abundance (e.g., donors) at the nonlocal level. To adequately address victim suffering in this environment, disaster responders need to manage the resource-asymmetry problem, or as Sirmon, Hitt, and Ireland (2007:

274) explain, "Value [in this case, alleviating victim suffering] is created only when resources are evaluated, manipulated, and deployed appropriately within the [organization's] environmental context." In our context, many resources were debilitated and rendered useless at the local level, yet local needs varied and required a customized response. Externally, resources were abundant, including financial donations, human capital, food and clothing donations, animal feed, and more. Donors were diverse and far-reaching, including disaster response organizations such as the Red Cross, state and national governments, the international community, private organizations, and individuals. This diverse set of suppliers provided an opportunity in the form of resources and a challenge in terms of the need to rapidly combine and deliver customized bundles of resources to address specific local needs.

Spontaneous venturing rapidly delivered customized solutions that accommodated local needs due to local positioning in the community and, as a result, addressed the gap created by resource asymmetry in two ways. First, spontaneous ventures used bricolage, or made do with the means and resources at hand (Baker and Nelson 2005; Lévi-Strauss 1966), which included "dependence on pre-existing contact networks as the means at hand," as well as on other skills, tools, and materials that could be rapidly accessed and repurposed to address victim suffering (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 17). Second, spontaneous ventures also engaged in "resource seeking" (Baker, Miner, and Eesley 2003) and sought new resources made available in the resource-abundant external environment, successfully bridging the connection between resource providers and victims. We explore resource seeking and networks in the next chapter.

Interestingly, the findings above lead us to speculate on two additional insights. First, the parochialism of "being local" may have a potential downside: while the literature has attributed blame for continued victim suffering in the aftermath of a disaster to established nonlocal organizations (e.g., Drabek 1985; Schneider 1992; Sobel and Leeson 2006; Stallings and Quarantelli 1985), we found some evidence that even if (or when) established organizations are responsive in their compassion organizing, victims may not be receptive. That is, an emphasis on being local may be a double-edged sword: on the one hand, an emphasis on being local facilitates spontaneous venturing that quickly customizes resource delivery to alleviate suffering, but on the other hand, it may inhibit established nonlocal organizations' delivery of resources at the scale and scope that could help reduce victim

suffering. Second, the findings from our studies provide evidence that those who initiate and manage spontaneous ventures—that is, those who alleviate victims' suffering—are also victims, and that the process of organizing compassion for others helps alleviate their own suffering (a relationship developed further in chapter 5). This indicates that there is a basis for self-organizing compassion.

### **Spontaneous Venturing**

In this chapter, we uncovered instances of ventures that immediately formed in the aftermath of a natural disaster (see Shepherd and Williams 2014; Williams and Shepherd 2016a) to address both temporary and long-term community needs by providing a spontaneous view of organizational emergence. This view highlights that the entrepreneurial process may be unplanned, spontaneous, and sometimes temporary but still capable of generating well-being for victims. The major insights concern the conditions and activities that characterize successful responses to suffering after a natural disaster and, more broadly, spontaneous venturing. There are a number of implications for the entrepreneurship and adaptation literatures.

First, we found that under some conditions—namely, in the aftermath of a natural disaster—the entrepreneurial process can be temporally compressed. Rather than organizational emergence taking years (Gartner, Carter, and Reynolds 2010; Lichtenstein, Dooley, and Lumpkin 2006) or months (Carter, Gartner, and Reynolds 1996), we found that ventures formed in hours. We used the term “spontaneous” to capture the speed of formation and to contrast it to the typical venture formation process discussed in the literature (e.g., Gartner 1985; Katz and Gartner 1988; Lichtenstein, Dooley, and Lumpkin 2006). However, even under these extreme conditions, we found evidence of a (time-compressed) process of organizational emergence—one that was inspired, cut corners, and had a singular focus. Over and above time compression in venture formation, we found that many of these ventures were short-lived, lasting only weeks to months. This suggests that a venture does not need to have a long life to have an impact. Indeed, for some spontaneous ventures, the greater their impact, the shorter their life.

Second, entrepreneurial opportunity is typically considered to occur in “situations in which new goods, services, raw materials, markets and organizing methods can be introduced through the formation of new



means, ends, or means-ends relationships” (Eckhardt and Shane 2003: 336). Ventures are formed to exploit opportunities (Gartner 1985; Gartner, Carter, and Reynolds 2010). In the context of a disaster, there may be few opportunities for profit (especially for temporary spontaneous ventures), but the lack of profit potential has little or no impact on the motivation behind the entrepreneurial activities of venture formation. For spontaneous venturing in our research context, the nature of the entrepreneurial opportunity and the motivation to act entrepreneurially to form a new venture was different from that documented in the entrepreneurship literature (Baum and Locke 2004; Baum, Locke, and Smith 2001; Shane, Locke, and Collins 2003): the opportunity and the motivation were to alleviate the suffering of victims in the aftermath of a natural disaster. In important ways, we continue the work of scholars of sustainable entrepreneurship (Cohen and Winn 2007; Dean and McMullen 2007), community-based entrepreneurship (Peredo and Chrisman 2006), and social entrepreneurship (Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern 2006; Peredo and McLean 2006; Weerawardena and Mort 2006) by looking beyond profit as both a defining characteristic of entrepreneurial opportunity and a primary motivator of entrepreneurial action. In this case, rather than entrepreneurial action reducing environmental degradation (Dean and McMullen 2007; York and Venkataraman 2010) or poverty (Zahra et al. 2009) through survival and legitimation (Kuckertz and Wagner 2010; Nicholls 2010; York and Venkataraman 2010), we found that spontaneous entrepreneurship was an important mechanism for alleviating victims’ suffering in the aftermath of a natural disaster and, by successfully doing so, led to a limited life span of some of the new ventures. We believe that future research can continue to add to the literature by further exploring noneconomic motives and outcomes of entrepreneurial action, including the temporary delivery of value.

Third, while the organizational slack literature has highlighted the importance of firms’ possessing “excess” resources to fund the experimentation necessary for entrepreneurial action (although with diminishing returns) (Bradley, Shepherd, and Wiklund 2011; Cheng and Kesner 1997; George 2005), research on bricolage has highlighted entrepreneurial action arising out of resource scarcity (Baker and Nelson 2005). Although we found that resource scarcity triggered some bricolage, we also found that the extreme resource scarcity of the local environment contrasted with the extreme resource abundance of the broader environment in which it was embedded. The problem and the

resulting entrepreneurial opportunity were to mobilize, coordinate, combine, and deliver nonlocal community resources in a way that met local needs. That is, although there is a substantial literature on entrepreneurs raising funds from venture capitalists (Cable and Shane 1997; Zacharakis, Meyer, and DeCastro 1999), business angels (Mason 2007; Mason and Harrison 2000; Maxwell, Jeffrey, and Lévesque 2009; Riding 2008), and public investors (Leleux and Surlemont 2003), we found that in the aftermath of a natural disaster, resources were readily available to spontaneous entrepreneurs (often without their even asking for resources); the key was to organize these resources to overcome bottlenecks to the delivery of products and services that alleviated suffering in the aftermath of the disaster. Therefore, rather than resource scarcity or resource abundance as the driver of entrepreneurial action, we found that the gap between local scarcity and the broader (nonlocal) environment's resource abundance triggered spontaneous entrepreneurship. There is an opportunity for future research to continue to investigate the interplay between opportunities arising from resource-scarce environments nested within resource-abundant environments.

Fourth, prior knowledge is central to explanations of why some individuals identify and pursue specific potential opportunities and others do not (Hayek 1945; McMullen and Shepherd 2006; Shane 2000). For example, Shane (2000: 451) stated that some people recognize opportunities while others do not because "people recognize those opportunities related to information that they already possess" from prior knowledge or experience. Indeed, scholars' emphasis has been on prior knowledge of markets (Shane 2000; Shepherd and DeTienne 2005) or technology (Grégoire, Barr, and Shepherd 2010). In our research, the defining feature of the spontaneous entrepreneurs' knowledge was its localness—a geographic idiosyncrasy—that was critical to the formation of ventures that alleviated victims' suffering after a natural disaster. This suggests that as we begin to explore potential opportunities and outcomes that are noneconomic in nature, we will likely need to expand our investigations of prior knowledge beyond technology and markets, or else take a broader view (perhaps not an economic view) of these concepts. That is, rather than demand (i.e., individuals with the capacity to pay for unsatisfied needs and wants), price, and market share, we could further explore satisfying fundamental needs (regardless of the capacity to pay) and outcomes, such as the alleviation of suffering and the number of people helped or saved.

Finally, there is a substantial literature on adaptation (e.g., Brown and Eisenhardt 1997; Virany, Tushman, and Romanelli 1992), which includes adapting to crises (Bigley and Roberts 2001; Grewal and Tansuhaj 2001; Maitlis and Sonenshein 2010; Pearson and Clair 1998) such as natural disasters (Anderson, Hellriegel, and Slocum 1977; Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa, and Hollingshead 2007). Consistent with the adaptation literature (e.g., Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, and Hunt 1998; Tushman and Anderson 1986), we found that established organizations had difficulty adapting to the complex and shifting nature of a disaster and its aftermath. Rather than focus on why and how some established organizations adapt more effectively than others, the evidence of response to the Black Saturday disaster pointed us toward a different mode of effective adaptation. By changing the level of analysis of adaptation from the established organization to the local community, we found that rapid and effective adaptation occurred through the spontaneous formation of new ventures. These spontaneous ventures stepped in to fill the gap left by established organizations' ineffective responses. Despite being slow, in many instances the established organizations did eventually adapt and begin to effectively alleviate victims' suffering. When they did catch up, the spontaneous ventures often disbanded (happily disbanded by the founders). Future research needs to further explore the relationship between established organizations' adaptation and spontaneous ventures. Does spontaneous venturing speed established organizations' adaptation by "showing the way" and eventually "handing over the reins," or does it delay adaptation by removing the urgency of adaptation efforts (because suffering is being alleviated by an alternative source)? Perhaps future research can build on the corporate venturing literature (e.g., Covin and Miles 2007; Miles and Covin 2002) to understand how established organizations may create their own new ventures in response to a natural disaster that may facilitate their adaptation and achieve important organizational goals.

## Conclusion

In the desperate context of a natural disaster, we found spontaneous venturing was triggered by established organizations' ineffective and slow response to the situation. This spontaneous entrepreneurship was characterized by the rapid formation of new ventures to alleviate suffering in the aftermath of a natural disaster; spontaneous

entrepreneurs' (who were also victims) reliance on local knowledge and networks to coordinate, combine, and deliver resources from an abundant broader community to a resource-scarce local community; and the short life of most spontaneous ventures. This chapter acknowledges the importance of spontaneous entrepreneurship in the aftermath of a natural disaster.

### **Practical Implications**

This chapter explored in detail examples of locals organizing to alleviate the suffering of fellow victims after a disaster. In doing so, we developed a theoretical model for how these processes of organizing emerged, as well as how organizations shaped victims' recovery. These findings hold a number of implications for various disaster stakeholders (e.g., government and nongovernment organizations, potential victims of a disaster). Perhaps most important, spontaneous compassionate venturing is inevitable: disasters unleash the compassion in individuals, who are drawn to help one another. Therefore these groups need to be integrated—or in the least acknowledged—in broader approaches to disaster response to maximize the alleviation of suffering.

In addition, spontaneous locally organized groups are often the most likely to be effective: they possess often unique local knowledge that enables rapid customized responses to the most immediate needs facing disaster victims. To ignore or obstruct these groups is devastating to the recovery process and inhibits ongoing efforts to work with locals toward long-term solutions. As such, outside organizations (e.g., nonprofits, government agencies.) should formulate plans for identifying and supporting these types of groups when disasters strike. How can agencies rapidly identify whom to support with resources? For potential victims of disasters, it helps to consider alternative methods for local communication should a disaster strike. Furthermore, as individuals develop personal crisis management plans, they could include the possibility that they may have the skills to organize a structured response should their local area be affected.

The following list summarizes the primary practical implications of the material discussed in this chapter.

1. Disasters can cause a lot of human suffering in varying forms and degrees.

2. Designated disaster response organizations face considerable obstacles to providing effective help.
3. Local people (in the disaster zone) face the loss of many emotional supports and physical resources.
4. Even when the compassionate resources employed are of large scale and scope, they cannot effectively reduce suffering if they are not customized and rapidly delivered to victims.
5. Persons and organizations from outside the disaster area want to help but do not always know how to assist or who needs aid the most. Local residents are the key to effective aid delivery.
6. Local residents should focus on the resources they have, not those they have lost, to spontaneously form ventures to help alleviate the suffering of fellow community members.
7. Local residents understand the importance of their local knowledge, and draw on it. They will know what others in the immediate disaster area are feeling and what they need. Spontaneous ventures should leverage this knowledge of local conditions, of who can get things done and how things are being done when local physical resources are devastated.
8. Spontaneous ventures should seek real-time information from local sources to inform their decisions and action, especially when the environment has changed quickly. This may entail acquiring information through word-of-mouth.
9. Spontaneous ventures should use community members' localness to coordinate other local people, organize those from outside the area to provide needed resources, and create a cohesive response. Indeed, localness may be necessary to overcome obstacles created by the command-and-control system.
10. Local residents should feel able to take action and trust their knowledge of their neighbors, their surroundings, and nontraditional ways of getting things done.
11. Local residents in a disaster area can emphasize the importance of community by representing, coordinating, healing, or rebuilding the community. This will help alleviate some suffering.
12. Local residents should feel free to improvise—that is, to design and act at the same time. Improvising is especially important to enhance communication (for coordination), facilitate logistics (to speed the delivery of customized compassionate resources), and create new bundles of available resources (including remaining local resources) to help alleviate suffering. This response may entail using

resources for purposes not previously envisioned and combining in creative ways resources not previously combined.

13. Local residents in a disaster area can overcome feelings of loneliness by undertaking actions that communicate that the community still exists and that victims still belong to that community.

14. Local residents may also overcome feelings of helplessness by undertaking actions that demonstrate that what the community does now will have a positive impact (on others and the community).

Taking small positive steps today can lead to additional resources and positivity in the future.

15. Local residents can overcome anxiety by undertaking actions that communicate a positive vision of the future, such as working to “build back stronger” or “build back better.” A disaster, while devastating, can provide the opportunity to rebuild many things in a community so that is even stronger than before.

16. Local residents can overcome uncertainty about the future by undertaking actions showing that the community has the ability and the desire to rebuild. A good way to show this is to actually begin rebuilding, even if it is a symbolic action.

17. Spontaneous compassionate ventures should be assessed according to how well they alleviate suffering. The more successful ventures may disband quickly because the suffering has been alleviated.

18. Perhaps new spontaneous ventures can be repurposed in some way to create a viable commercial business after their initial mission is concluded. Persons involved in such ventures should identify new skills or abilities that emerged through the compassionate venturing process that may be more broadly applied beyond the disaster response.

Appendix 3.A. Spontaneous Ventures Created to Alleviate Suffering

Opportunities to alleviate suffering	Venture founder(s)	Personal losses	Previous job or experience	Spontaneous venture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide immediate and long-term housing solutions to displaced fire victims.</li> <li>• Communicate survivor lists by establishing community-driven websites and speaking directly to media representatives.</li> <li>• Establish regular communications through town meetings and other community-driven communication methods.</li> <li>• Draw on local knowledge and networks to pool, access, and distribute needed resources to affected fire victims.</li> <li>• Establish a rebuilding plan, resources, financing, and other solutions for business owners, providing a “launching pad” for recovery.</li> <li>• Coordinate donations, including raw materials and services, to encourage the rebuilding of businesses.</li> <li>• Provide locally driven psychological support for both the short and the long term.</li> <li>• Provide grief counseling that encompasses both a “loss orientation” and a “restoration orientation.”</li> <li>• Engage and draw out community members to identify and address emotional suffering.</li> </ul>	<p>Graeme Brown and Judy Frazer-Jans (and others)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal property (home, vehicles, and all possessions)</li> <li>• Business property (medical clinic)</li> <li>• Personal injury requiring hospital stay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former shire councillor and mayor, local forestry and tourism (Brown)</li> <li>• Former nurse in charge at a hospital, national defense consultant (Frazer-Jans)</li> </ul>	<p><i>The Marysville and Triangle Development Group (MATDG)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The purpose of this group is to reconstruct the Marysville area in terms of population settlement, infrastructure repair and improvement, and business development.</li> <li>• Operations began February 9, 2009, two days after the fire, and are ongoing.</li> </ul>



## Appendix 3.A. (continued)

Opportunities to alleviate suffering	Venture founder(s)	Personal losses	Previous job or experience	Spontaneous venture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate the storing and distribution of food supplies, water, equipment, tools, and other essentials.</li> <li>Draw on local knowledge and networks to pool, access, and distribute needed resources to affected fire victims.</li> <li>Use existing equipment and tools for alternative purposes, including clearing roadblocks, fighting remaining fires, and providing for animals.</li> <li>Utilize local and national networks to obtain feed and fencing materials and distribute them to needy organizations.</li> <li>Coordinate agistment of animals to locations not affected by the fire, provide medical care to animals, and remove damaged and dangerous materials from properties.</li> <li>Coordinate donations, including raw materials and services, to encourage the rebuilding of businesses.</li> </ul>	<p>Judith Clements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About 150 acres of farming land were burned, with extensive loss of fencing, native vegetation, and pasture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fifth-generation farmer</li> <li>Former president of the Victorian Farmers Federation</li> <li>Member of Whittlesea Agricultural Society</li> </ul>	<p><i>Whittlesea Farm Relief:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This group organized the mass identification of supplies (e.g., fodder, fencing materials) and coordinated the distribution to needy farmers.</li> <li>Operations began February 9, 2009, two days after the fire, and ended roughly six weeks later.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate the storing and distribution of food supplies, water, equipment, tools, and other essentials.</li> <li>• Draw on local knowledge and networks to pool, access, and distribute needed resources to affected fire victims.</li> <li>• Use existing equipment and tools for alternative purposes, including clearing roadblocks, fighting remaining fires, and providing for animals.</li> <li>• Utilize local and national networks to obtain feed and fencing materials and distribute them to needy organizations.</li> <li>• Coordinate agistment of animals to locations not affected by the fire, provide medical care to animals, and remove damaged and dangerous materials from properties.</li> <li>• Coordinate donations, including raw materials and services, to encourage the rebuilding of businesses.</li> </ul>	<p>Karleen Elledge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minor damage to personal property</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captain of CFA fire brigade (comprising nine members)</li> <li>• Owned and managed a cleaning business (with 14 employees)</li> <li>• Owned a direct-to-the-public cleaning products store</li> </ul>	<p><i>Bayles Relief Centre</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Started a relief center that provided food, clothing, day-labor support, hay, and animal fodder; coordinated the sorting and distribution of donated items and managed more than 600 volunteers.</li> <li>• Operations began February 8, 2009, one day after the fire, and ended roughly four weeks later; remaining assets were transferred to the Labertouche Relief Centre.</li> </ul>
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## Appendix 3.A. (continued)

Opportunities to alleviate suffering	Venture founder(s)	Personal losses	Previous job or experience	Spontaneous venture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate the storing and distribution of food supplies, water, equipment, tools, and other essentials.</li> <li>Draw on local knowledge and networks to pool, access, and distribute needed resources to affected fire victims.</li> <li>Utilize local and national networks to obtain feed and fencing materials and distribute them to needy organizations.</li> <li>Coordinate donations, including raw materials and services, to encourage the rebuilding of businesses</li> <li>Provide grief counseling that encompasses both a "loss orientation" and a "restoration orientation."</li> <li>Provide immediate and long-term housing solutions to displaced fire victims.</li> <li>Draw on local knowledge and networks to pool, access, and distribute needed resources to affected fire victims.</li> </ul>	James Kennedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive damage to business (his hotel), financial loss from damages and lost profits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small-business owner (hotel owner/manager)</li> <li>Experience with Four Wheel Drive Victoria</li> </ul>	<p><i>Black Spur Relief Centre</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided accommodation, daily meals, water, and emotional support to evacuees, firefighters, and police officers; managed and coordinated the distribution of donated goods, including food, clothing, and bicycles.</li> <li>Operations began February 8, 2009, one day after the fire, and ended four weeks later.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide immediate and long-term housing solutions to displaced fire victims.</li> <li>Draw on local knowledge and networks to pool, access, and distribute needed resources to affected fire victims.</li> </ul>	Juliet Moore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate property damage, power disruption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner in an architecture firm</li> </ul>	<p><i>re-Growth Pods</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed the initial design of a cost-effective mobile housing unit that could allow people to return to their homes and begin rebuilding.</li> <li>Operations began February 14, 2009, seven days after the fire, and are ongoing.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear roads and utilize alternative routes to rescue individuals and deliver key supplies.</li> <li>• Use existing equipment and tools for alternative purposes, including clearing roadblocks, fighting remaining fires, and providing for animals.</li> <li>• Coordinate the storing and distribution of food supplies, water, equipment, tools, and other essentials.</li> <li>• Establish regular communications through town meetings and other community-driven communication methods.</li> <li>• Coordinate donations, including raw materials and services, to encourage the rebuilding of businesses</li> <li>• Provide locally driven psychological support for both the short and the long term.</li> <li>• Provide grief counseling that encompasses both a "loss orientation" and a "restoration orientation."</li> <li>• Engage and draw out community members to identify and address emotional suffering.</li> </ul>	<p>Doug Walter</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suffered damage to home and surrounding property as well as destruction to the golf course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee of the Department of Justice, fair trading consultant, vice president of the Marysville Community Golf Club</li> </ul>	<p><i>Taggerty Heights "Dad's Army"</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Converted a previously existing community group (developed to fight fires in their immediate community) to a group focused on obtaining food and resources and continuing to defend at-risk properties.</li> <li>• Operations began February 7, 2009, the day of the fire, and are ongoing.</li> </ul>
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## Appendix 3.A. (continued)

Opportunities to alleviate suffering	Venture founder(s)	Personal losses	Previous job or experience	Spontaneous venture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw on local knowledge and networks to pool, access, and distribute needed resources to affected fire victims.</li> <li>• Establish a rebuilding plan, resources, financing, and other solutions for business owners, providing a “launching pad” for recovery.</li> <li>• Coordinate donations, including raw materials and services, to encourage the rebuilding of businesses.</li> </ul>	Lachlan Fraser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suffered destruction of home and business and had a personal injury requiring hospitalization and surgery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical doctor and small-business owner</li> <li>• Experience as an ultramarathon runner</li> </ul>	<p><i>Marysville Marathon Festival</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized what became an annual marathon festival to (1) generate solidarity as a community, (2) return tourists to the Marysville community, and (3) raise money for local recovery projects.</li> <li>• Operations began February 14, 2009, and are ongoing.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw on local knowledge and networks to pool, access, and distribute needed resources to affected fire victims.</li> <li>• Provide locally driven psychological support for both the short and long term.</li> <li>• Provide grief counseling that encompasses both a “loss orientation” and a “restoration orientation.”</li> <li>• Engage and draw out community members to identify and address emotional suffering.</li> </ul>	Bruce Morrow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lost his home, all of his family’s belongings, and 10 bed and breakfast cottages he owned and operated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small business owner and operator</li> </ul>	<p><i>Gold Coast Getaway:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized a holiday for 50 Marysville victims to Australia’s Gold Coast; arranged for donations from corporations, travel groups, and celebrities.</li> <li>• Operations began March 20, 2009, and ended May 11, 2009.</li> </ul>