The Local Coffee Shop: 
A Social Enterprise Brewing Java to Cultivate Community

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Abstract

Social enterprises are on the rise. The movement is fueled by consumers who expect businesses to expand the power of their dollar by having core business values that impact and raise awareness for social causes. Businesses like coffee shops can take a lead role in developing their community’s resources and economic status. The purpose of this study is to identify key concepts of a socially-minded coffee shop to encourage replication of the model at new social enterprise coffee shops. This case study details the efforts of Brewpoint, a coffee shop in Elmhurst, Illinois, to both make a profit and influence their community locally and globally. Brewpoint works with community members to raise money and increase awareness about social issues and sources their coffee responsibly from farmers in the Philippines, Guatemala, and elsewhere. Data was gathered through observation at the shop and qualitative interviews with employees and founders, then synthesized into the five key concepts: startup, mission, community, team, and operational details.

Research question

What are the distinct elements of a coffee shop whose mission is to be a community-oriented social enterprise?

Project Background

The modern coffee shop craze continues to rage throughout the United States and around the world (Turk, 2016). It is a public place of work, habit, and socialization that grows in popularity by the minute – especially for the Millennial generation (Solomon, 2015). Millennials expect their dollar to do more; they want the places where they shop and eat to connect to them and their community on a level that businesses have not traditionally embraced. Today, businesses recognize this evolving trend and are doing their best to capitalize on the shift.

Social entrepreneurs take that a step even further. Social enterprises are businesses formed with a mission to sustainably solve or aid a problem within their community (Bornstein, 2010). Social entrepreneurship is a developing field that is focused on communities and has the potential for exploratory research in many capacities (Bornstein, 2010). Coffee shops are
typically community-oriented by nature and have the potential to impact their immediate and global communities through responsible business practices.

In this case study at Brewpoint Coffee Company in Elmhurst, Illinois, I formulate five key concepts of social enterprise cafes: startup, mission, community, team, and operational details. These categories were used to formulate a questionnaire for interviews with the founders and managers at the shop and are the basis for further replication of Brewpoint’s model at other coffee shops.

A distinct operational aspect of some social entrepreneurship coffee shops, including Brewpoint, is the model in which they choose to use to source their coffee from farmers. Though responsible methods of trade are more costly and time consuming, coffee shops paying prices that allow coffee farmers a living wage and respectful trade have the opportunity to impact communities far beyond their own cities. The role of international communities and farmers that produce coffee cannot be forgotten, but it often has been in the recent history of the coffee

The production methods and buying practices of large multinational corporations in developing countries has come under scrutiny for exploitative and inequitable trading conditions. The rise of the ethical consumer and related lobby groups has put pressure on producers to be more accountable and transparent in their dealings with farmers and coffee bean harvesters in developing nations...The number of industry enterprises is anticipated to grow at an annualized rate of 7.1% to 670 during the five-year period, as new industry operators attempt to enter the market and develop a market niche for premium coffee produced both sustainably and ethically. (Turk, 2016)

Several methods to address these social issues have become prominent in the trade of coffee. One such method is fair trade. Fair trade is a global movement that many coffee drinkers are aware of, but do not know how the designation process works – or if it helps producers at all. Valkila’s article in *Ecological Economics* studied the effects of fair trade on growers and found that the designation, when paired with organic farming decreases farmers’ production capabilities, and thus profits, because of the organic coffee requirements (2009). Coffee growers are not compensated for the decrease in production and are sometimes unable to stay in the market as a result.

In addition to requirements that harm the farmer’s profitability, fair trade’s current price of less than $1.50 per pound of coffee ([www.fairtrade.net](https://www.fairtrade.net/standards/price-and-premium-info.html)) is much lower than what the farmer needs to support themselves. In 2007, the minimum price of fair trade organic green coffee was

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1 [https://www.fairtrade.net/standards/price-and-premium-info.html](https://www.fairtrade.net/standards/price-and-premium-info.html)
$1.41 per pound, which was a fraction of the final retail price at about $7.00 to $12.00 per pound. Jaffee says in *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival* that “By the time transport and administrative costs are deducted, the amount that percolates down to the individual farmer is usually between 5 and 10 percent of the retail price” (2007). The distance and layers between the farmers’ fields and the consumers’ cups adds to the cost of the coffee and often producers are left struggling to make a profit and continue operations.

For many companies, including Starbucks, fair trade ends up being a marketing tool for their brand image and there is little consideration of the producer’s bottom line (Jaffee, 2007). The coffee trade is not the only industry impacted by the desire to court consumers’ money through investment in social causes. “Greenwashing” is a term that refers to “a company that tries to portray itself as more environmentally minded than it actually is” (Gelles, 2015). In the recent case involving Volkswagen, fraud was committed in an effort to win customers seeking more environmentally friendly cars. This market’s desire for socially responsible goods allows companies like Volkswagen to push a false initiative of responsibility and convince consumers that the company values environmental issues, when it is actually only concerned with profits. In the same way for coffee, it is easy for consumers to “feel good” about packaging and marketing that boasts of “fair trade coffee” but the actual certification is not 100% indicative of fairly-treated farmers. Of the consumer experience with fair trade products, Jaffee says,

> …consumers can visualize a more or less direct link with the producer and imagine (even if inaccurately) that every fair-trade certified bean in their morning cup was picked by democratically organized, fairly paid farmers in one particular coffee cooperative.

It is this ability of fair trade to put a face on commodities, to
convey information about the social conditions under which they were produced— and about the people who produced them—that is key to the movement’s moral power. (Jaffee, 2007)

Despite its pro-market associations, the concept of fair trade is a beneficial one as it encourages consumers to consider where their coffee comes from and who makes it. In an interview with Ben Tanen from Brewpoint Coffee Company, he addresses the upside of fair trade,

Fair trade was great in thought and when it started it was great. Essentially coffee took a huge dip in the late 80’s early 90’s…Fair trade came in and said, if you’re a fair trade farm this is the minimum your coffee will be paid for…So for that period of time, farmers for fair trade were making more than average, they were making a living wage, essentially…So it’s a really great insurance policy if coffee prices were to plummet again. (Tanen, 2017)

The system does need to be in place because if coffee prices ever plummet, fair trade will provide a necessary price floor to protect farmers (Stark, 2012). However, for the purpose of this study – creating a replicable model of socially-minded cafes – fair trade coffee is not the best measurement of a socially responsible coffee shop.

A better measure of a socially-minded café’s alignment across the five concepts is direct trade. Direct trade is another form of coffee procurement that social enterprise shops and roasters are expanding in the coffee industry. The method creates a single line between roaster and grower to cut out price-gouging middlemen and ensure that the coffee is responsibly traded in a more transparent manner (Stark, 2012). It is focused on enhancing the relationships between farmers and roasters.
The Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) brings together coffee connoisseurs from around the globe and has a vast wealth of industry information (sca.coffee\(^2\)). It has closely tracked the direction of coffee procurement, including the development of direct trade. A panel featuring leadership from prominent coffee companies that use the direct trade model, such as Intelligentsia Coffee and Tea, discussed the concept of direct trade with the SCA (Stark, 2012).

In short, an ideal direct trade coffee relationship is one where shop members regularly visit the farmers at their farms, pay a reasonable price for the coffee so the farmers have a living wage, and invest in the farmer’s community financially or through economic empowerment. In exchange for fair treatment, farmers then are willing to implement changes in their growing process to better tailor their system to create a higher-quality final product.

Of course, direct trade is not perfect, either. The method runs into some of the same problems as fair trade in that some roasters say “direct trade” on their packaging and in their marketing, yet they have little actual communication with their farmers.

Direct trade, while it seems really great, better than fair trade, has a lot of issues as well. And a lot of people [say], direct trade is bad, but it’s the best that we have right now…A lot of it comes down to there’s not a standard direct trade model, every company has their own, then you get companies saying they’re direct trade when they talk to their farmer once but have never been to their farm. (Tanen, 2017)

Greenwashing-type marketing may start to effect direct trade’s image as well, and it is important for true direct trade companies to be aware of the imperfections of the system. Also, direct trade contracts between farmers and roasters need to keep market prices in mind for coffee to avoid the

\(^2\) https://sca.coffee
issue that fair trade faces: underpaid farmers. However, as Geoff Watts, Director of Coffee at Intelligentsia Coffee and Tea says, “It is an approach, founded on the idea that farmers and roasters ought to be working in tandem, with mutual trust and respect, and for mutual gain. When that is the case in practice, there is little to worry about” (Stark, 2012).

Literature Review

Upon reviewing prominent texts and journals in the budding field of social entrepreneurship, few case studies in academic journals provide tangible examples of social enterprise coffee shops. There are several examples of coffee shops with positive, locally-oriented missions, but few academic or popular works that formally study the coffee shops in existence found after thorough research. Documenting a case study of a coffee shop’s operations and processes encourages wider replication of their models for entrepreneurs on a global scale and addresses a gap in the social entrepreneurship literature. The relevant and available academic data provides a perspective that guided the research question and methodology.

Social Entrepreneurship: An Evidence-based Approach to Creating Social Value, looks at the “big picture” of social entrepreneurship and was an essential text in determining the five concepts in which the interview questionnaires were based on. Bielefeld and Guo detail the process of establishing a social enterprise during the stages of idea generation, and opportunity assessment. These include identifying the social needs and assets of the community, assessing the entrepreneur’s ability to impact the problem using the enterprise as a tool, and gauging the effectiveness of the possible future social enterprise. These foundational concepts provide the basis for replicability for a model like Brewpoint’s.
Methodology

Identifying the Case Site

Initially, possible sites were investigated using a search tool on the B Corps website. B Corps are “for-profit companies certified by the nonprofit B Lab to meet rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency” (www.bcorporation.net\(^3\)). This designation is a certification paired with measurable and maintained requirements for B Corp businesses around the world. There are less than fifteen roasters and coffee shops certified by B Corps in the United States. Fewer still strive to tangibly address problems in their immediate communities through hosting events or prompting dialogue about difficult issues. Two examples of social enterprise coffee shops in the United States were found using the B Corp tool; Blue State Coffee in Boston, MA and Higher Grounds Trading in Traverse City, MI. (Appendix D contains a full list of qualified coffee shops). Both of these shops make contributions to community organizations, place priority on fair treatment of their employees, and source coffee responsibly, but due to budget and time restrictions on the research, they were not feasible case studies.

As the field of social entrepreneurship does not have a standard or prominent source of information, there were few avenues for identifying qualified shops. However, the sociological and economic importance of such community building enterprises and the concomitant lack of standards to identify them or templates to replicate them further strengthen the need for case studies such as this one. After searching though B Corps, Ashoka (a global organization that links universities and social enterprises), and local Chicago social entrepreneurship resources and finding no local shops, Brewpoint Coffee Company in Elmhurst, Illinois was discovered through

\(^3\) https://www.bcorporation.net
a connection with North Central College. Brewpoint exhibits all the elements of a phenomenal social enterprise: community involvement, actions leading to social change, dialogue about tough issues, and investment in their employees. The existing relationship aided in connecting with the owner, Melissa Villanueva, and she agreed to allow the research to commence.

Due to budget and time constraints, a traditional quantitative form of methodology that included data from many shops for the study was not possible. This case study on Brewpoint Coffee based on interviews using the five concepts discussed earlier and was conducted with the purpose of replication and knowledge-sharing with other coffee shops. Brewpoint is an example of a combination of elements that create a healthy environment for social involvement and change locally and internationally.

*Interviews*

I conducted the semi-structured, in-depth interviews at Brewpoint Coffee Company’s Park Avenue shop with the founders and three key managers over seven weeks beginning on February 22, 2017 and concluding on April 14, 2017. Seven hours total were spent interviewing the subjects over four non-consecutive days during the seven weeks. A key focus of the interviews was to explore the mission of the social enterprise and how it sustains the core principles of the organization. I also observed the environment at the shop, taking systematic notes using four categories: physical environment, clients, staff, and non-physical environment. For example, these included notes about the aesthetics, employee-customer interactions, and how customers pass time in the shop. Just over four hours was spent in observation. A tour of the facility by Melissa provided a full picture of the physical environment of the café. I also documented key visual elements of the shop using photography which can be found in Appendix
F. Below is a list of interviewees, interview details, and a short explanation of the subjects’ roles at the shop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Date and Time</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melissa Villanueva</td>
<td>10:00-10:30AM Wednesday, February 22, 10:00-11:30AM Friday, April 14</td>
<td>Brewpoint Coffee 124 W. Park Ave. Elmhurst, IL 60126</td>
<td>Co-Founder, Owner</td>
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<td>The idea for Brewpoint came to Melissa while in the Philippines helping with typhoon relief. Since then, she has been the company’s “fearless leader”. Currently, she is overseeing the development of their second location on the north end of Elmhurst.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angelo Sepúlveda</td>
<td>1:00-2:30PM Friday, March 10</td>
<td>Brewpoint Coffee 124 W. Park Ave. Elmhurst, IL 60126</td>
<td>Co-Founder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angelo, Melissa’s husband and co-founder, challenged Melissa to quit her job to open Brewpoint. His role consists of strategic planning and executing new projects and processes. Angelo is currently developing a procedure for employees to formulate and pitch ideas that can be implemented at Brewpoint.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ben Tanen</td>
<td>10:00-11:00AM Thursday, March 2</td>
<td>Brewpoint Coffee 124 W. Park Ave. Elmhurst, IL 60126</td>
<td>Coffee Quality Manager, Head Roaster</td>
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<td>Ben wears many hats at Brewpoint. He started working at the shop soon after it opened and now is the shops’ Coffee Quality Manager. Ben’s knowledge of the industry and experience working behind the counter helps him as he trains new and current employees. At the new location, he will manage the new roasting segment of the business at Brewpoint.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Collins</td>
<td>3:00-4:30PM Thursday March 2</td>
<td>Rall House 329 S Brainard St Naperville, IL 60540</td>
<td>Finance Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael came to Brewpoint as a barista and saw that when Melissa and Angelo were managing the finances that they were stuck in the office instead of out in the shop or in the community. He offered to help them manage that role and freed up some of the Co-Founders’ time. I met with Michael on campus instead of at Brewpoint because he lives in Lisle and the drive was convenient for him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sara Steinhoff</td>
<td>11:00-12:00PM Thursday, March 2</td>
<td>Brewpoint Coffee 124 W. Park Ave. Elmhurst, IL 60126</td>
<td>Operations/General Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sara was taken with Brewpoint’s culture the moment she walked in the shop for the first time. By the end of the week she had an interview with Melissa for a new job as a barista and marketing communications intern. Since then, her responsibilities have grown and she is now the Operations/General Manager of the Park Avenue shop. Her responsibilities include inventory, managing orders, staffing the shop, training, managing daily operations, as well as community outreach.</td>
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Interviews were conducted in alignment with the principles discussed in *Interviewing for Social Scientists* (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Dates and times for the interviews at each site were scheduled in advance with the founders and managers. During the interviews, I took notes on my personal laptop and recorded the conversation using a portable voice recorder from North Central College. Key quotes and notes from the interviews are located in Appendix B. Before the interviews commenced, I asked each participant to sign a document for informed consent and read a document detailing the participant’s rights. The interview content focused on predetermined qualitative questions (Appendix A) but there was freedom to address topics and details outside of the questions based on where the discussion led. I entered each conversation with basic background knowledge about the company but only for the purpose of prompting the interviewee to share about certain topics.

**Analysis**

After collecting data, I began the data analysis process. Using Arksey and Knight’s (1999) framework for analyzing data, I made connections and comparisons for the data at Brewpoint by identifying categories and themes in the interview content based on the five predetermined concepts in the predetermined questionnaires (Appendix A). The interviews focused on five concepts of the business: startup, mission, community, team, and operational details. While analyzing the data, I compared and contrasted the interviewees’ responses to the questions to create a picture of Brewpoint’s core values and operations. I also looked at the *Chicago Tribune* and mysuburbanlife.com’s articles featuring Brewpoint to understand the community’s response to and perspective of the shop. Using the synthesized interview data, industry data, and news articles, I established relevant connections from the research.

**Results**
Brewpoint Coffee Company is a prime example of a social entrepreneurship coffee shop because it has a deep care for the community and a people-centered business model. The object of this study was to determine the “distinct concepts” that drive the organization’s mission. Through analysis, two themes came forward in the data; Brewpoint values investing in their team members and has high standards for how it procures its coffee beans. Every aspect of business operations is touched by the founders’ desire to create an authentic, responsible community space. From the sourcing of their coffee beans in the Philippines and Guatemala to the team dynamic they have with their employees, respect and empowerment characterize every step of Brewpoint’s coffee-making process.

Through semi-structured interviews with the two founders and three managers, observation in the shop, and outside research, a holistic picture of Brewpoint Coffee Company revealed itself. Five concepts identified in the questionnaires were used to analyze the data: startup, mission, community, team, and operational details. Three central concepts, mission, team, and operational details proved to be the points that make Brewpoint’s model unique and replicable. Brewpoint’s mission to invest in people feeds the organization’s care for its team and the decision to use direct trade coffee, a core operational detail. Altogether, each concept works in harmony to support the organization’s goals. The following results are a cumulation of all interviews and observations based on the five concepts.

**Concept 1: Startup**

* I was thinking a lot about how space connects with how people feel…Some spaces are really great for you to just think. Other spaces are really good for you to connect one-on-one. Other spaces are really good for you to have a meeting. The way in which you create the space is conducive to different types of connection. Melissa Villanueva, Co-Founder and Owner

*Being able to create something that people said was kind-of impossible…Being able to see that come into fruition and for it to work is incredibly rewarding. It is the ownership of it. Right? To be able to say this is something I have valued my whole life and to be able to make it work…and
to find other people who have also felt that way during their lives and find their place here at Brewpoint, it's just incredibly rewarding. Melissa Villanueva, Co-Founder and Owner

There is something that is very difficult to describe in terms that feel full, that don’t feel limited, when you’re able to do something that is your own. I know that’s very common and trite for small business owners to say, but it’s true. Angelo Sepúlveda, Co-Founder

We knew [we needed] consistent hours, we needed to be present, we knew we needed top-notch customer service. Angelo Sepúlveda, Co-Founder

Melissa Villanueva and Angelo Sepúlveda began Brewpoint Coffee Shop in Elmhurst, Illinois in September, 2014. The idea sprung from Melissa’s vision for an authentic community space while spending time in the Philippines after a typhoon ravaged the country. She recently quit her corporate job (after encouragement from Angelo) and was taking time to figure out her next step. In the Journal of Business Ethics, Campin, Barraket, and Luke discuss the relationship that micro and small businesses in Brisbane, Australia have with the community. They claim owners have a direct connection to the purpose of their business in the form of micro-business social responsibility (mBSR). They say that when micro-businesses succeed or “do good” in their community, owners feel that they likewise succeed and “do good”. Melissa felt deeply connected to the idea of a community and wanted to see it evolve in a business model that was both successful, socially conscious, and active. She returned to the U.S. with the idea for a coffee shop where community was at the heart of the organization.

Armed with plans for the authentic community space she dreamed of, Melissa was searching Craigslist to look for an espresso machine in order to refresh her coffee-making skills from a previous job at Starbucks. Instead, she found the location for their shop on Park Avenue in Elmhurst. Thanks to the support of Angelo, family, and friends, the shop was purchased and renovated in about two months. The couple opened the shop in a whirlwind as a sole proprietorship LLC under Melissa’s name. Deciding on a name for the café was initially a daunting task. While researching names online to see if they were already taken by other shops,
Melissa searched the name “Brewpoint” and found that the only other coffee shop in the world named Brewpoint was in the Philippines, the place where she first had the dream for their shop. It was a sign.

Such a quick startup and early success, due to positive community reception of the shop, left Melissa and Angelo significantly understaffed even as the customers continued to increase. The couple started with 15 pounds of coffee per week and currently the shop is roasting 115 pounds per week – an astounding rate of growth over two and a half years. Hiring part-time baristas was the next challenge of the early days of the café. In her past job, Melissa felt like people were treated like a sale, she wanted Brewpoint to be a place where her passion for genuinely investing in others could shine through the team she and Angelo would create.

Application: The startup story of a social entrepreneurship venture matters. Melissa and Angelo felt compelled to bring an authentic community space to Elmhurst. These passions drove them to make risky, expensive, and bold decisions, but tireless work has now allowed them to expand into their second location.

Concept 2: Team

The staff is tighter than any other staff I’ve ever worked with and it’s been like that since I started... if you want to do something, you can do it, you just have to make a plan, set it up and if you need funding, the shop can help, there’s a lot of room for creativity. Ben Tanen, Coffee Quality Manager

Melissa and Angelo have created a space that has really become a home for not only me but everyone who works here. We all take such high ownership for the work we do here and the excitement in the air as we expand is contagious...I enjoy the work I do but it's the Brewpoint family that I could never step away from. Sara Steinhoff, Operations/General Manager

Employees are why we do what we do...and they are why we do what we do well...They’re what makes Brewpoint, Brewpoint. Sara Steinhoff, Operations/General Manager

I love being able to be the type of boss that I wish I had. Melissa Villanueva, Co-Founder and Owner

One of our core goals of hiring someone is for them to be able to be themselves and to grow further into their role. And that means if you’re kind of awkward, fine. Can you harness that and
lean into it in a way that people love? Are you really into sports or video games or books? Be that. We want to help people better explore the things that fire them up and excite them and encourage them and hopefully empower them to continue down that path. Angelo Sepúlveda, Co-Founder

We’ve shifted to a model where our focus is on team development and team care and the team’s focus is on customer development and customer care. Angelo Sepúlveda, Co-Founder

Brewpoint’s first hires were committed regular customers at the shop in its first few weeks. They already bought into the culture that Melissa and Angelo were establishing and wanted to join the team. Friendliness and an openness to learn characterized their earliest baristas and this not only made the shop a great place for everyone to work, but also a welcoming environment for customers. Baristas remember their regular customers’ names and orders and customers often linger at the register or coffee bar to chat with the baristas. Brewpoint employees are always ready to make a drink suggestion for customers and spend careful time crafting the latte art that tops each milky masterpiece. The environment of happy employees and satisfied customers kept the shop growing and Brewpoint continued to hire new employees. For a coffee shop, Brewpoint’s hiring process is extensive. It includes a phone interview, in-person interview, and a shadow day at the shop, all to ensure that the prospective new team member fits into the culture and will be a positive addition to the team.

With new people, the couple now felt the increased pressure of providing for their employees, and they rose to the challenge. Over time, team members like Ben Tanen, the current Coffee Quality Manager and soon-to-be Head Roaster in the new facility, became family. Brewpoint is a place of employment, but also a genuine community space in that people could be themselves while brewing great coffee. Angelo and Melissa supported their new team relationally and in turn their team got to know the ever-increasing number of customers that frequented the shop. There is such strong mutual trust that the shop’s managers have keys to
Melissa and Angelo’s apartment above the shop and they even created an office work space in their spare room for managers to use throughout the day (and sometimes to crash for the night).

An important goal for Brewpoint became that their employees felt they could be themselves and think creatively to enhance various aspects of the shop. In standardized chain coffee shops, most of the atmosphere of the café is dictated by a corporate entity. Merchandise displays, special offers, and marketing campaigns are uniform across all locations in corporate coffee shops like Starbucks to help regulate the customer experience. At Brewpoint, the openness to new ideas allows employees to integrate their talents and specialized skills at the shop. Ben wanted to enhance their coffee’s quality using new techniques and he introduced new coffee standards at Brewpoint. Deanna Jones, a barista and artist at Brewpoint, showed an interest in calligraphy, so Angelo and Melissa sponsored her to take a class and commissioned her to write out their story using her newly-honed skills. The story is framed on the wall in the shop for all to see (Image 1, Appendix F). Projects like these are often formed into internships for baristas and include a stipend for their work. Pavel Adámek is currently working as a barista and intern to and uses his professional photography skills to showcase Brewpoint’s products and branding. Melissa and Angelo strive to allow their employees creative space to use their strengths at the shop and integrate new ideas.

It became clear to Melissa and Angelo that investing in their baristas and managers was a defining quality of Brewpoint’s identity as a coffee shop. It cultivated a welcoming culture and fun work environment for everyone. Now, in Brewpoint’s third year of operations, investing in employees has a firm place in the organization. Angelo and Melissa have heard many valuable ideas from their team, but sometimes the ideas would get lost or remain stagnant due to busy schedules and passing conversations. To better stimulate the team’s creativity, Brewpoint is in
the process of enacting a formal idea pitching process where employees with an idea for a project or process change at the shop like a new drink or community activity, do the front-end research and preparation on what the project entails, then pitch it to the management team. If the idea has promise, the employee is granted access to Brewpoint’s financial and organizational resources to own their project and bring it into fruition. One barista wanted to do a March Madness-style bracket tip jar competition. Another barista, Lana Sutker, draws the chalkboard menus and art. This is valuable empowerment and encourages employees to grow within Brewpoint and as individuals – a truly unique model.

Angelo’s broad role includes creating processes like these. The lack of definition in his position at Brewpoint allows him to take a big picture plan or process and work to improve existing systems. These tasks are similar to the practice of Kaizen, or continuous improvement, an idea brought to the West by Japanese author Masaaki Imai (Kaizen Institute, 2017). Angelo can see where he and Melissa want the shop to be in the future and addresses needs in the present to better prepare for that time. For instance, with plans for the new location underway, Melissa and Angelo are unable to be at the Park Avenue shop as much as they used to in the shop’s first two years. In order to maintain the standards and procedures they set in place when the shop was founded, Angelo is currently documenting and developing standard operating procedures that provide instructions on fundamental activities at the shop like buying milk and cleaning café equipment. This sets a precedent and allows employees to manage operations on their own with less intervention and management from Angelo and Melissa.

*Application:* When a company invests in their team, the employees will take care of the company. Brewpoint’s desire to let their employees express themselves creatively forms a family-like atmosphere where employees then pass that same care on to customers. Supporting
employees is an integral piece of Brewpoint’s mission to reach out to their community and that concept can be used in any organization.

Concept 3: Mission

I love the fact that [Brewpoint] focuses on the people...All of my efforts are getting put into something that’s benefitting the people around me. I don’t necessarily know if I could find that other places. Michael Collins, Finance Manager

My main priority is to make sure that every customer who comes in feels like a guest in our house. Sara Steinhoff, Operations/General Manager

I want it to be a place in which people come and it expands their viewpoint...That’s why our place is travel-themed...Everything was about expanding your exposure. Melissa Villanueva, Co-Founder and Owner

What we’re building towards and what we want to be able to do is be leaders in our industry around creating authentic community spaces. How we’ve created not just our space, but our work culture and being able to be models of that for other companies who want to create things like us, that is what I want to be really good at and be able to see more of. Melissa Villanueva, Co-Founder and Owner

The #NotAfraidToLove campaign was about a month-long donation drive where we guaranteed that all tips up to a certain dollar amount received, we would match and donate to the Syrian Community Network here in Chicagoland. I am still very proud of that model. I think Melissa and I came up with something that was fairly elegant, because people didn’t have to support it. There was no element of, if [customers] disagreed they shouldn’t buy our coffee because none of that money was going to [the organization], it was purely, “if you are interested in supporting this, go ahead and support our employees and we’ll match”. Angelo Sepúlveda, Co-Founder

With more customers and eager employees, Brewpoint saw many opportunities to get involved in their community. Following their simple mission statement of “Creativity. Coffee. Community”, Brewpoint initiated community events, both financial and product donations, and sponsorships of important local events. On top of donating coffee products and funds each month to local causes, Brewpoint has hosted three major initiatives focused on awareness and social change. Appendix E contains images of social media updates of all three of these events.

Brewpoint’s first campaign in December 2015, #NotAfraidToLove, used social media to generate dialogue in the community about the global refugee crisis. It was purposed to engage visitors at the shop and take a stand on a controversial issue in the U.S. In addition to the social
media campaign, as a fundraiser for the Syrian Community Network in Chicago, Brewpoint
decided to match each tip the baristas received so that customers had the choice to contribute or
not. This method both benefitted employees and allowed customers who may not feel
comfortable with the initiative to abstain from donating, while still enjoying coffee at the café.

A recent campaign, called “Latte Love”, was a social media activity hosted in February
2017, rooted in the Elmhurst community. Customers and community members were encouraged
to do something kind for their neighbors or be conscious of the kindness of others then post a
picture and tell the story on social media featuring Brewpoint’s #wholelattelove sticker and the
hashtag (See Figure 13 in Appendix E). Not only did #wholelattelove encourage the members of
the community that participated, it also established Brewpoint as a positive and welcome
environment in downtown Elmhurst.

Brewpoint additionally participated in an in-store fundraiser for the ACLU that was
coordinated by Sprudge, a major online source for coffee information. This was a weekend-long
event that over 850 coffee shops participated in throughout the nation (sprudge.com4). The
purpose was to raise awareness for refugees and encourage love and understanding instead of
fear. This initiative is undeniably controversial, but the topic of refugees is an important one for
Angelo and Melissa so they decided to join the initiative.

Mutual respect is what builds Brewpoint’s credibility with the community. Instead of
being an organization that tells people what they should care about or believe, Brewpoint started
dialogue and respected the opinions of their customers. Building this camaraderie as a business is
difficult, but the authentic atmosphere and consistent investment that Brewpoint exhibits
throughout the Elmhurst community speaks volumes as to how much meticulous care and

thought the owners and staff invest into the campaigns. As an organization with a mission, it is important to expand people’s minds and do it in a way that’s not condemning them for having different opinions, which closes their minds to new information. If businesses organically come alongside people through community involvement, as Brewpoint has in so many ways, then people learn to respect the causes that Brewpoint supports and may be prompted to learn and think more about them. People do not need to change their minds, but it’s a good discussion point that prompts change.

*Application:* Brewpoint has a clear mission to invest in people and every action of the business is viewed through that lens. The company sees the needs and strengths of their community and actively searches for ways to enact their mission. A clear and passionate mission that the whole team is on board with is essential for a successful social enterprise.

**Concept 4: Community**

*My hope is...that I preserve the experience I first had walking into the shop...To always provide a high quality cup of coffee, a space to be creative and enjoy the community as well as connect with other people and connect others to one another.* Sara Steinhoff, Operations/General Manager

*It creates that idea that we want you here. I know your name. I know your drink. I know your kids. It might sound creepy [laughs]. But we care about the fact that they’re a person and not just money coming in.* Michael Collins, Finance Manager

*Maybe we don’t need to go and find a community that fits us, maybe we need to build a community that fits us here. And so that was a huge shift in us. This is rooted in our faith, but our purpose is to build the kind of community we want to see, here in Elmhurst.* Angelo Sepúlveda, Co-Founder

*I want to make sure [the new location] is right for the community...I’ve found that if you’re collaborative and you’ve proven that you want a win-win situation, [The city of Elmhurst] will work with you. They want what’s best for their community.* Melissa Villanueva, Co-Founder and Owner

In a very fundamental way, Brewpoint’s major strength is supporting other local businesses and organizations. This comes in the form of donations, but also as business partnerships with other local businesses. Donut Drop provides Brewpoint with donuts on the
weekends and Blooms and Branches, a flower shop that runs out of the back room and Brewpoint’s Garden Room, shares space with the shop (Image 14 and 15, Appendix F).

Brewpoint’s presence at city events for the Elmhurst Public Library and the Elmhurst Art Museum also establishes its relationship with the community. Brewpoint hosts several community events such as a monthly book club and board game nights that are open to all.

Brewpoint is also the host location for Elmhurst Public Library’s Learn to Knit class on Wednesdays at 6:30pm. Of the shop’s relationship with the local library Brewpoint’s blog says, “We treasure our connection to the library and only want to strengthen it” (O’Toole, 2017).

Brewpoint plans to partner even more frequently with the Elmhurst Public Library at their new, more spacious location.

The Park Avenue location is Brewpoint’s first shop in Elmhurst. In the Fall of 2017, Brewpoint is set to open its newest edition to the Brewpoint Coffee Company family: a café, roastery, and large community space in the north side of Elmhurst. Melissa and Angelo’s goal is to make this new location a destination shop in the western suburbs. The additional space will allow Brewpoint to host larger events and serve more customers in a new area of town with people that may not have visited the Park Avenue shop before. Customers will be able to see the roasting operations in action to better understand the process of producing coffee. This next step was made possible through a $75,000 grant from the City of Elmhurst, which will allow Brewpoint to renovate the new building and create the atmosphere they are hoping to build. The city knows Brewpoint is committed to Elmhurst and wants to fuel their growth as they invest in the city.

Roasting is an important new addition to Brewpoint’s portfolio and will become even more essential once the new location opens. They already have strong direct trade sourcing
partners in Guatemala and the Philippines and will bring that relationship full-circle by roasting the beans themselves. This direct trade model is a perfect fit for Brewpoint. It requires much more effort and intentionality than traditionally sourcing coffee, but Melissa and Angelo want to ensure that they conduct fair business practices in every aspect of their operations, including with the farmers that grow their beans. Melissa recently visited their sourcing partners, Kalsada Coffee, in the Philippines to observe how the company integrates itself within the Filipino community and does not merely coordinate the sale of coffee beans, but conducts training and quality assurance to improve the final product. They enrich the Filipino communities by providing jobs, building a community mill in the farmer’s region, conducting quality coffee education, and by investing overall in the individuals of the communities by living amongst the farmers to make sure the community mills are running at one hundred percent (Villanueva, 2017). This method holistically benefits the farming community by improving the quality of the beans, but also by ensuring the farmers and their families have the resources to develop their communities, as well.

Brewpoint’s partnership with Kalsada Coffee is ideal because of its social responsibility and investment in the farmers that produce their high-quality beans. Brewpoint’s conscious sourcing truly brings their mission full circle from the farmer to Elmhurst. As a city that is considered generally well-off, Elmhurst doesn’t necessarily need empowerment, but it has a huge capacity to empower other communities through practices like direct trade, fundraising, and sparking dialogues in the broader Chicagoland area. Melissa and Angelo sensed this when they chose to put down roots in Elmhurst and community members and the city have been more than willing to help further their cause. Brewpoint hopes to be an example for other shops of what a
socially responsible organization can do in their local and global communities to impact individuals.

*Application:* The importance of community is engrained in every employee at Brewpoint and the value influences conversations with customers locally and trade with farmers globally. Being wholeheartedly dedicated to genuine relationships with people gives Brewpoint authenticity and credibility as an organization. Before any institution can become socially-oriented it must fully understand the characteristics of the community they seek to serve.

**Concept 5: Operational Details**

*Our goal is to keep expenses as low as humanly possible and that way we can give more. We want to improve our bottom line that way so that it does not take away from donations. As soon as you start taking away from donations it messes up our business and takes it out on the people we impact.*  
*Michael Collins, Finance Manager*

*The more business that we do through our roasting side, the more that we can impact our sourcing side. We have a revenue goal on that because to us, it means that we have brought in more business for our source.*  
*Michael Collins, Finance Manager*

*Essentially since then, I’ve become the Growth Manager…I’ve had to learn real estate, I’ve had to learn city code, I’ve had to learn how to make a buildout in architecture.*  
*Melissa Villanueva, Co-Founder and Owner*

*I am very impressed with Kalsada…The Philippines doesn’t really have good coffee in general…No one is specifically investing in the coffee quality, until Kalsada. And what Kalsada is doing is that they are literally living in the midst of the farms, building these community mills, teaching farmers how to have better quality coffee and sorting through it to a level where they are making sure that it’s the best of the best and it’s what they bring to the States so they can be competitive in the specialty coffee market. It is direct trade – it’s just very impressive…People should look at what they’re doing.*  
*Melissa Villanueva, Co-Founder and Owner*

*“[Direct trade] really falls in line with our community values; we really want to affect the local Elmhurst community, we want to be a part of the Chicago community, but also…we want to be a part of the global community. So much of coffee is booming in the states, and coffee farmers are still making nothing. For us it is really important to actually have that relationship with the farmers to find out what they need, what they don’t need, what their community needs, as well as pay more for their coffee and knowing that your money is going to the farmers.”*  
*Ben Tanen, Coffee Quality Manager*

Brewpoint operates like an average coffee shop. From the outside looking in, it may not seem that different, but making coffee at Brewpoint is the result of many moving parts that are
each carefully monitored and operated through the lens of community, investing in employees, and responsibly sourcing coffee through direct trade. Through structured observation at the shop, I documented my interactions with the physical environment, staff, clients, and non-physical environment. These data points paint a holistic picture of the shop from the viewpoint of a customer and are replicable in other coffee shops that are pursuing a community focus. From sourcing the coffee to greeting customers in the shop, each action is intentional and works towards Brewpoint’s overarching goals.

Direct trade is a central to the relational atmosphere Brewpoint seeks to have at the shop and with their farmers. Ben Tanen’s technical knowledge and Melissa’s desire to connect in a genuine way with farmers in places like the Philippines and Guatemala only fits with Brewpoint’s goal to be an authentic community space. Melissa has visited their producers in the Philippines (through Kalsada) and Guatemala (through Enactus at North Central College) and has been blown away by how, particularly Kalsada, comes alongside the farming community in such a tangible way. While it does have its pitfalls, properly orchestrated direct trade is a responsible model that any coffee shop can adopt. The coffee quality manager, Ben Tanen, has largely been responsible for training baristas as they learn to create the drinks and operate the café equipment to bring the process of direct trade full-circle. This is essential in providing a consistent, high-quality product that customers can count on while showcasing the farmers’ coffee.

Brewpoint not only invests in the community through sweat equity, it donates finances and products for community events hosted by many organizations like the Elmhurst Public Library and Park District. Brewpoint is the presenting sponsor for events like Elmhurst’s annual Art in the Park, which is in its twenty-first year and is the largest outdoor artist event in the
western suburbs. While every business must consider the bottom line in order to succeed, Brewpoint makes giving a priority as an organization. Monthly, the shop donates about $250 to local causes and yearly about 5% of revenue is donated. The management team is currently working on a system to fully track when product is donated as it often happens in an informal way. Brewpoint proudly participates in Elmhurst’s events and adds value to many aspects of the community, creating a trustworthy and authentic brand.

In observing Brewpoint, elements of the shop’s physical environment, staff, clients, and the non-physical environment better defined the brand for me and solidified the customer experience. Images of the shop that better exhibit what the space looks like can be found in Appendix F. Observing the physical environment included looking at visual elements like the menu boards, aesthetics in the shop, and the furniture and fixtures. The shop overall emits a friendly feeling. Comfy vintage couches and a cozy nook with cushions invite customers to sit for extended periods of time and read a book or work, which was what several customers were doing. The theme of the shop is travel and the copper map, whimsical wall quotes, and globes in the front corner window create a welcome “vibe” for wanderlust visitors. The large front windows allow a good amount of natural light to enter the shop and they feature three words on the windows: “Creativity. Coffee. Community.” Board games and books are piled high on shelves near the front corner window, inviting customers to relax and have fun during their visit. Warm-colored wood surrounds the coffee bar where baristas create the drinks, but in the back “Garden Room” white walls bring in more natural light and create a simple and bright environment to do work or talk with friends.

The staff was a constant presence in the shop. They greeted and initiated conversations with regulars and other customers constantly and their presence was felt audibly from the café
noises of creating the drinks and speaking with customers, and visually as the space is somewhat
tight, yet there were typically six to seven working at a time and they frequently walked in and
out from behind the bar. After only returning once to the shop, I began to recognize barista’s
faces and had pleasant conversations with several of them. Each of them were knowledgeable
about the products and were willing to explain a coffee roast or drink to a customer or make
suggestions for them. A common question I heard repeatedly was “your usual?” Other
customers chatted with them about Frank Sinatra or their newborn twins. The new mother asked
for a double shot of espresso because she needed a boost after not getting any sleep the night
before – she and the barista shared a good laugh. While the shop was slower, baristas would chat
with each other and on one occurrence, someone brought in a new recycling bin and the staff
behind the counter let out a cheer of excitement. Interviews with managers made it clear that the
team is valued incredibly and that investing in them is top priority for the shop.

There is rarely a time when the shop had no clients. Early in the morning, prior to the
8:03AM train to Chicago on the Metra Union Pacific West line located across the street,
commuters get a coffee to go and leave to wait on the train platform, but most people drop in for
their coffee then leave. Friendly chatting amongst familiar commuters wakes up the shop.
Starting around 8:00AM customers begin meeting up with each other or come to do work in the
shop and plant themselves in the comfy seats for some time. Outside, pedestrians walk past
Brewpoint’s hand-drawn a-frame sign and cushioned outdoor seating with dogs, children, or
alone. The Metra roars by regularly across the street throughout the day, making the shop a
prime location for commuters in the morning and afternoon. Students working on homework,
people meeting friends or colleagues, and people of all ages doing work at the shop are all
common occurrences.
The non-physical environment is described by intangible qualities at the shop like background music, advertisements on the television in the corner above the bar, conversations of other customers and baristas, promotions at the register and, of course, the smell of coffee. The music choices varied each time I visited the shop, ranging from casual rock and indie to neutral “oldies” tunes. The conversational buzz of the shop was nearly incessant as people chatted with each other and baristas. The television features “advertisements” for Brewpoint’s community events like their monthly book club, pictures of product offerings and specialty drinks, and information about Kalsada and other coffee suppliers. The common theme of the featured information is community and encouraging connections through relationships. Promotions at the register like a punch card program and coupons are used to attract and retain customers. While I was there, Brewpoint was participating in Elmhurst Restaurant week by offering one dollar small coffees. These elements provided an avenue for connections to happen at Brewpoint.

**Application:** The details are what make any organization effective or ineffective. Brewpoint’s operations are deeply rooted in their mission and on that alignment, the integrity of the organization rests. For a social enterprise coffee shop focusing on investing in people, direct trade is a natural model to adopt. The model is more difficult to achieve, but brings full-circle authenticity to the business’ operations.

**Conclusion**

**Summary of Findings**

This case study analysis of Brewpoint Coffee Company provides a dynamic view of the shop’s core concepts of startup, mission, community, team, and operational details. Three key concepts, mission, team, and operational details depict Brewpoint’s model and the elements of each can be modeled at other social entrepreneurship coffee shops. Brewpoint’s mission to fuel
creativity, coffee, and community in their organization is at the center of everything the company does. It is a form of “moral compass” that feeds the company’s investment in their employees and care for operational details like their direct trade practices. Refer back to the figure on page 4 to illustrate the flow of this process. Melissa and Angelo’s passion for Brewpoint’s values fuels their desire to grow the shop and invest in others. Brewpoint’s team is what enables the organization to exhibit its mission. Because of this, Angelo and Melissa value their employees greatly and encourage them to be themselves at the shop and use their unique talents and passions to build a welcoming and dynamic environment. Employees have bought into the mission and work eagerly to invest in the community. Operational details are seen through the filter of community as well, and Brewpoint’s efforts to source their coffee using direct trade is one of the highlights of their business. Direct trade is not an easy avenue for sourcing coffee because it requires investment in relationships around the world. But Melissa and Angelo value people and the fair treatment of farmers, so the process is well worth the financial and relational investment it requires. Everyday details at the shop prove essential to Brewpoint’s identity, as well. Initiating valuable customer interactions, knowing the shop’s community and its needs, and sharing the causes they care about from a place of understanding and respect are central to the organization as a whole.

Application

This case study serves to equip social entrepreneurship coffee shops that are working towards creating a community-centered environment like Brewpoint’s by detailing the core concepts that define the coffee company. Based on the findings within the five concepts of startup, mission, community, team, and operational details, other coffee shops can implement the broad values that Brewpoint exhibits like employee investment, direct trade, and overall care for
their immediate and global communities. The more specific practices at Brewpoint like their social media and in-shop campaigns and fundraisers, community event sponsorships, internship experiences, and community business partnerships can be implemented at other shops and tailored to the needs of those shops’ communities. Brewpoint wants to share their values and model with social entrepreneurs and be a proponent of real change and responsible operations in the coffee industry.

Recommendation for Further Research

Coffee shops with similar models to Brewpoint exist, but due to limited resources and a desire for depth and specificity, this study was limited to a single case study. One opportunity for further research would be conducting a quantitative analysis of several social entrepreneurship cafes focused on community investment. Quantifying data using several coffee shops would allow for even further replicability and a perspective from differing environments and communities. Additionally, a cultural perspective in the field of social entrepreneurship coffee shops would add to the greater dialogue as similar social enterprise movements spring up in other countries like Australia. See Appendix C for more information about Australia’s coffee industry.
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Appendix A

Qualitative Interview Questions for Founders

**Story:**

What is your story and Brewpoint’s story?
What is your role currently?
You live above the shop? What is that like?
Why do you like working here?
What is one of your favorite Brewpoint stories? (employees, events, customers, etc.)

**Mission:**

What cause is Brewpoint focused on impacting or helping?
What is your role in this mission?
Do you have a “mission statement” or something similar?
If so… What was the process of defining it?
How do you explain your mission to customers or people outside your organization?
What is the best part about being an organization with a mission?
What is the most challenging aspect of being an organization with a mission?
What are the top three goals of your organization? How do you assess if the goals are being met?
What is one long-term goal of your organization? How will you assess if the goal is achieved?

**Community:**

Do you work with the local government at all?
What groups usually rent space at Brewpoint?
What three words describe your community?
What is the best asset of your community? What is the greatest weakness of your community?
Can you talk about the international community you desire to impact via coffee sourcing, etc.?
What is a memorable experience you have had with an international partner?

**Startup:**

How was your organization initially funded?
Which legal entity are you filed as? (LLC, L3C, Partnership, etc.)
Most businesses want to profit, how does Brewpoint’s model impact its financial operations?
What did Brewpoint do differently in the startup phase that set it apart from coffee shops that failed in this location previously?

What research did you do prior to opening Brewpoint (location, demographics, etc.)?

Can you talk about Brewpoint Coffee’s newest plans (roasting and café)?

**Marketing:**

How do you engage customers at Brewpoint in a way that encourages them to return?

Have you heard of the B Corp designation? If so, would you consider becoming certified?

Who is your target market?

Do you use promotions to attract customers?

**Team:**

How did you form your initial startup team?

What is the role of your employees in relation to your mission?

What is the most valuable trait you look for in someone who joins your team?

What are your team dynamics? Could you share an example?

What can employees expect from you and Brewpoint?

It sounds like employees feel they can be creative and implement their ideas at the shop. What is essential in creating this atmosphere?
Qualitative Interview Questions for Managers

Story:
How did you come to Brewpoint?
What is your role?
Why do you like working here?

Mission:
What cause is Brewpoint focused on impacting or helping?
   What is your role in this mission?
   What is an example of your organization making a difference for this cause?
What activities or events does your organization participate in or host that support your mission?
How do you explain your mission to customers or people outside your organization?
What is the best part about being involved in an organization with a mission?
What is the most challenging aspect of being involved in an organization with a mission?

Community:
What is the role of your organization in your immediate community?
What three words describe your community?
What is an asset/weakness of your community?

Team:
What is a trait that your organization values in its employees?
What are your team dynamics?

Operational Details:
Where do you find coffee industry information?
You are a direct-trade coffee shop, why did you choose this model?
   What are the pros/cons of this model?
Where are your beans sourced from?
What connections do you have to other social entrepreneurs throughout your area or the world?
What training do your baristas go through?
Can you talk about Brewpoint Coffee’s newest plans (roasting, café)?
Appendix B

Interview Results, Quotes & Notes

Startup

How was your organization initially funded?
- Angelo’s savings and items donated by friends and community members

Which legal entity are you filed as?
- Sole proprietorship, LLC (Owner, Melissa)
- Brewpoint Coffee Company is the overarching company and the individual shops are subsidiaries (Park Ave. shop and new location)

What did Brewpoint do differently in the startup phase that set it apart from coffee shops that failed in this location previously?
- Intentional personal connections with customers
- High coffee quality and responsible sourcing
- Consistency and customer service
- Community involvement

What research did you do prior to opening Brewpoint (location, demographics, etc.)?
- Local shop visits
- Conversations with locals
- Menu and pricing research

Can you talk about Brewpoint Coffee’s newest plans (roasting and café)?
- Investing in Elmhurst and reaching a new part of town
- Roast own coffee for cost efficiency and a true “direct trade” model
- An increased amount of space for events and employee training
- Transparency on the roasting process for customers (viewable roasting area)
- Additions of healthy food options (smoothies, oatmeal bowls)

Background Questions:

How did you come to Brewpoint?
- Most members of the leadership team (managers) began as hourly baristas and asked for more responsibility as they got to know Melissa and Angelo

What is your role?
- Ben: Coffee Quality Manager and Head Roaster (at new location)
- Sara: Operations/General Manager (mainly Park Avenue shop)
- Michael: Finance Manager
- Melissa: Co-founder and Owner
- Angelo: Co-founder and Strategic Special Project Supervisor

You live above the shop? What is that like?
- Work/Life balance is tough but the convenience is unbeatable
Able to be there for any emergencies, while also being able to step away
Part of the culture of Brewpoint

Why do you like working here?
Room for creativity and growth
Fun and supportive culture

What is one of your favorite Brewpoint stories? (employees, events, customers, etc.)

Team
How did you form your initial startup team?
It began as Angelo, Melissa, and a friend helping them out during the soft opening and they quickly hired people because of the shop’s success
Many people came from Elmhurst College and were regulars before being hired

What is a trait that your organization values in its employees?
Idea generation, initiative, teachability, friendliness
“First and foremost good people. I know this seems like an obvious trait but we really look for people who have care for others. This is demonstrated through not only being a team player in their work ethic but by how an employee treats our guests. Having good morale, empathy, and grace is what makes our culture so open and inclusive. Besides these character traits we have a high expectation for interest and ability to learn coffee” (Sara Steinhoff)

What are your team dynamics?
Supportive, creative freedom, employee-focused, relationally-oriented
“We have a blast together. From being friends outside the shop to our holiday parties, quarterly team bonding, and now annual camping trip over Labor Day! Our team dynamic is very collaborative: everyone pitches in in their own way. From Meghan’s writing skills for our blog, to Lana’s incredible handwriting skills for our menu’s and signs we truly have the best staff there is. Our employees are very much a part of our mission and why we do what we do and how we do it well” (Sara Steinhoff)

What can employees expect from you and Brewpoint?
Fair treatment, honesty, support

It sounds like employees feel they can be creative and implement their ideas at the shop.

What is essential in creating this atmosphere?
Creating a process for proposing new ideas with funding to back and execute them
Being open to all ideas and encouraging the employee to pursue and execute the idea

Mission
What cause is Brewpoint focused on impacting or helping?
Social justice: refugees, human rights
Community diversity and investment
• Employee development and enrichment

**What is your role in this mission?**

**What is an example of your organization making a difference for this cause?**

• “We truly have our hands in the community. From sponsoring all of the wonderful events put on in Elmhurst from all of Roz Long’s Art Events such as Art in the Park and the Holiday Market to the bike race, 4 on the 4th and the No Frills Fun Run. We work with the Park District to provide coffee and hot chocolate at all of their events as well as get involved with the City at Rock the Block! We host “sip ‘n’ stitch” and game nights with the library. We have had 6 interns through Elmhurst College and host their first look Friday events to showcase the Elmhurst Community to incoming students. We have gotten involved on a global level with our not afraid to love campaign to support Syrian refugees in Chicago and continue to work with organizations like the ACLU. And more is to come...there is no limit on community. Our expansion will lend even more focus on the global community with our commitment to ethical sourcing in several different countries” (Sara Steinhoff)

• Latte Love social media campaign

• $250 financial/product donations monthly

• #NotAfraidToLove (Refugee awareness): Brewpoint joined 800 coffee shops in donating financially to the ACLU by matching a weekend’s worth of tips (thus, benefitting employees and the cause without forcing participation)

• Funding barista’s innovation ideas for the shop

**How do you explain your mission to customers or people outside your organization?**

• It’s all about community. Caring about the individuals that invest in Brewpoint on a personal and relational level to create a community space for shared ideas and connecting.

**What is the best part about being involved in an organization with a mission?**

• The bottom line covers more than just expenses, it provides the relational community cornerstone that gives Brewpoint the culture that makes it unique.

• Ability to invest in different causes and people

• Feel good about what you’re doing

**What is the most challenging aspect of being involved in an organization with a mission?**

• So many different areas that the mission can be focused towards but limited resources

• Some people may not agree with the premise behind the mission (ex: #NotAfraidToLove campaign)

**Community**

**What three words describe your community?**

**What is an asset/weakness of your community?**

• Assets: location, generosity, support
- Weakness: homogeneous, insulated

**What is one experience you have had with an international partner?**
- Visiting the Philippines with Kalsada and Guatemala with Enactus
- Kalsada Coffee partnership in the Philippines: best example of direct trade Melissa is aware of

**What is the most challenging aspect of being involved in an organization with a mission?**
- “The most challenging part is wanting to get involved in everything! Our mission is very clear but it manifests in many different ways. What is wonderful about working at Brewpoint with our mission for community is it takes form in many different ways. Being able to connect with so many different people is a true blessing” (Sara Steinhoff)

**Operational Details**

**How do you engage customers at Brewpoint in a way that encourages them to return?**
- Meaningful interactions (remembering names/orders/personal details)
- General friendliness
- A mission outside of profits
- Investing in employees so employees can invest in customers
- Providing a high-quality product

**Most businesses want to profit, how does Brewpoint’s model impact its financial operations?**
- Bottom line includes a certain amount of charitable donations and activities
- However, without profit, Brewpoint cannot operate, so responsibly maintaining the business is essential

**Where do you find coffee industry information?**
- YouTube, Cat and Cloud, conversations and training

**You are a direct-trade coffee shop, why did you choose this model?**
- Have a personal relationship with the farmers and understand their growing techniques, economic conditions, etc.
- Ensure the coffee is high-quality and purchased at a fair price

**What are the pros/cons of direct trade?**
- Does not address some of the economic needs of the farmers or their communities

“[Direct trade] really falls in line with our community values; we really want to affect the local Elmhurst community, we want to be a part of the Chicago community, but also, coffee is a global thing. We want to be a part of the global community. So much of coffee is booming in the states, and coffee farmers are still making nothing. Through direct trade, we found that by having a direct relationship with the farmer, [you can] find out what they need help with, because some companies will say they’re direct trade – this coffee company says they’re direct trade and they bought this equipment for the farmer and then we went and interviewed the farmer and they say “we don’t know why they bought this for us, we don’t need this, we need water, we need wells,
we need schools, this is cool that they bought this for us, but that $8,000 could have done so much more for us.” And that’s from that coffee company just wanting to put “we’re direct trade” [in their marketing] and not really following through with it.

For us it is really important to actually have that relationship with the farmers to find out what they need, what they don’t need, what their community needs, as well as pay more for their coffee and knowing that your money is going to the farmers. A lot of coffee deals with middle men…they’re called cayotes, where they’re buying coffee really cheap, then they’re making really all the profits and the farmers aren’t seeing any of it. So through direct trade, you’re eliminating as many middle men as you can. And then on the flipside you want to help the farmers but it also helps you get a better product. Once you have that relationship with the farmer, you can let them know, “hey, the coffee you made was great, it tasted like this.” A lot of coffee farmers…don’t have researchers, they learned from their father who learned from their father. In the same way as coffee here, that information is just now being recorded its just now being published. So you can go to the farmer and say I’ve heard this method changes this in the coffee, would you be willing to try that? And a lot of farmers wouldn’t do that, but with that direct trade, we can say “you try this” were going to buy the coffee no matter what. Whether it comes out better or worse, we’ll still buy it. This is kind of a risk-free process for you. Whereas, without direct trade it’s hard to ask things of farmers or have them do it because [they say], why would I change what I know and then if you don’t like it you don’t buy it.

Fair trade was great in thought, and when it started it was great. Essentially coffee took a huge dip in the late 80’s early 90’s…. Coffee prices just plummeted. Fair trade came in and said, if you’re a fair trade farm this is the minimum your coffee will be paid for. And it was a lot higher than what coffee was being sold for at the time. So for that period of time, farmers for fair trade were making more than average, they were making a living wage, essentially. I think it was $1.50 was the minimum, farmers were making less than $1 per pound. As time has gone on, fair trade really hasn’t adjusted with inflation, and also companies may say their fair trade in the states or anywhere and that is seen as a great marketing thing. The fair trade price is a lot lower than the average price of coffee. People could be saying their fair trade, and people go to Whole Foods and they say “oh I buy this fair trade coffee” but really you’re screwing those farmer because fair trade is a lot lower than what the average price of coffee is. So it’s a really great insurance policy if coffee prices were to plummet again, fair trade is there and it will save a lot of farmers. It’s not perfect though…Direct trade, while it seems really great, better than fair trade, has a lot of issues as well. And a lot of people have been quoted recently saying, direct trade is bad, but it’s the best that we have right now… And a lot of it comes down to there’s not a standard direct trade model, every company has their own, then you get companies saying they’re direct trade when they talk to their farmer once but have never been to their farm. So they put those on there as marketing but they’re not. It has a lot of pitfalls” (Ben Tanen).

Where are your beans sourced from?

• The Philippines, Guatemala, Peru, Columbia
What connections do you have to other social entrepreneurs throughout your area or the world?
- Conferences, trainings, ConVerge Project CEO, roasters

What are your financial goals:
- 5% growth, $250 donations/month

Do you use promotions to attract customers?
- Punch cards, $1 coffee, free samples outside of shop
Appendix C

Cultural Note

By definition, coffee is a global commodity and a global topic. It is important for social entrepreneurship organizations to remain aware of the issues surrounding the coffee industry. Globally, social entrepreneurs want to share knowledge and learn from the endeavors of other shops as they deal fairly with farmers through methods like direct trade. Melbourne, Australia is a hotbed for this kind of social entrepreneurship coffee shop activity as over fifteen coffee shops are affiliated with the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission (ACNC) in the city (ACNC, 2016). This organization regulates Australian charities by encouraging public trust through accountability and transparency, supporting a thriving not-for-profit sector, and advocating for easy operations and low barriers for affiliate organizations (acnc.gov.au5).

One such unique shop is Kinfolk Café, a coffee and sandwich shop in Melbourne, Australia, which has been a source of community support for six years. On their website, Kinfolk proudly proclaims “We give a fork” and their socially-minded businesses activities fully support this mantra (kinfolk.org.au6). The business’ mission is undeniably community-centered as 100% of their profits are donated to local charities, community events are hosted in the shop, and it is run by volunteers. Future research at Melbourne coffee shops would shed light on what element creates the uniqueness of Australia’s coffee shops so that it can be implemented in future coffee shops globally.

6 http://kinfolk.org.au/about
Appendix D

Additional Coffee Shops for Further Research

Blue State Coffee – Boston, MA (B Corps certified)
Higher Grounds Trading – Traverse City, MI (B Corps certified)
Kinfolk Coffee – Melbourne, Australia (ACNC certified)
STREAT – Melbourne, Australia (ACNC certified)
Common Groundz Community Café – Sydney, Australia (ACNC certified)
Bitty & Beau’s Coffee Shop – Wilmington, NC
Axum Coffee – Winter Garden, FL
Transcend Coffee – Edmonton, AB, Canada
The Little Red Roaster – London, ON, Canada
Appendix E

Social Media Posts

Figure 1 Kalsada Coffee

Figure 2 Sketch of Brewpoint’s new location in North Elmhurst
Figure 3 The Brewpoint team going camping as teambuilding over Labor Day weekend
Coffee Culture

For a good caffeine jolt in a warm friendly atmosphere, check out these top independent coffee shops

by Jay Capp

“As long as there is coffee in the world, how bad could things be?”
— Writer Cassandra Clare

Love coffee? Then you know how terribly cruel life can be. We suffer too often from coffee hell at car repair shops, school functions and gas stations. OK, so we’re being dramatic. But as long as you can get in a car and enjoy being around other coffee lovers, why ever settle for any coffee other than great coffee? So, as we try to tamp down on our own caffeine buzz after sampling too many cups of joe, following, in no particular order, are our choices for best local independent coffee shops.

And a word or two about how our choices were made. Just as sugar, cream and other flavor agents elevate the taste of coffee, so too do the furnishings and feel of a coffee shop enhance the overall experience of a cup of brewed beans. Our top coffee shops not only know how to brew, but also understand that we often leave our house seeking a place that is like our home.

Figure 4.1 Brewpoint featured in West Suburban Living
Coffee Culture

to John Lennon and Muddy Waters, who actually lived a few blocks away.

Many patrons order a pastry with their coffee. Gennette handpicks 50 pounds of blueberries and cranberries each week and arrrives at 2 a.m. to make muffins. Healthy? Maybe. Incredibly tasty? You bet.

The coffee here is rich and flavorful. Featured regularly are Guatemalan Antigua, Royal Kona, Mexican Altura and Jamaica Blue Mountain. The Mocha Java is smooth and robust. Especially recommended is the spicy Snickersdoodle. What's in it? "That's a secret," says Gennette with a smile.

Brewpoint Coffee, Elmhurst

Regulars love the coffee here but also say they feel at home, a connection with others and the community forged over a cup of hot brew. That's entirely intentional — building community was the founding principle of owner Melissa Villanueva, whose experiences aiding disaster victims led her to open Brewpoint three years ago.

Villanueva was the director of recruitment and development at a financial firm when she flew to the Philippines to lend a hand after a devastating typhoon. She liked her job but decided she needed to find more meaningful work. "I really wanted to do something I was passionate about. My vision was to create an authentic community space," she says.

Her vision apparently was meant to be. She scanned Craigslist for an espresso machine but instead found a coffee shop for sale. A multi-year business plan quickly became a reality.

Good intentions don't necessarily mean good coffee, of course. But Brewpoint has exceptional coffee. Its signature drink is the baguelling Barnolome (drinks are named after explorers), a coconut, almond-based coffee sweetened perfectly with cinnamon and honey. Also outstanding is the Japanese coffee, brewed over ice to lock in the flavor.

Brewpoint is an attractive shop with touches of whimsy such as the suitcases and globe on the window ledge. Outside is a dog station with a tie-up post and two shiny water bowls. Cheryl and Mike Eise are here today with their dog for their Saturday coffee. "We know the owners. Well, we know them now," says Cheryl, explaining the friendly appeal of the shop.

Such as Starbucks. River City Roaster is a third wave heaven, whose true believers regard coffee as an artisanal foodstuff similar to wine.

The artisanal lattes such as almond maple, hazelnut and vanilla are appreciably better than those sold at chains. Seasonal lattes such as a bourbon spice latte are wonderful, too. But don’t leave without trying the salted brown caramel latte. It veers close to but does not cross the boundary of what a craft coffee can and should taste like. In other words, it’s a delight.

Funky Java Coffee House, Villa Park

Minutes after the shop opens, Bob and Chris Arpp breeze into the coffee shop. There is no need to tell owner Larry Paggi their order. "We're here seven days a week," says Bob. "We like the coffee. We

Business has been so brisk that Brewpoint is opening a roaster and café on the north end of Elmhurst. A renovated loading dock houses the second location.

River City Roasters, Wheaton

Artisanal coffee rules the roost in this downtown Wheaton shop. River City Roasters looks like a North Side of Chicago indie coffee shop with its scuffed wooden floors, high tin ceiling, cinder-block shelves, college-radio music (thankfully, not too loud) and full-haired, youthful patrons. It is indeed a genuine "third wave" coffee destination — the first wave being mass producers such as Folgers and the second wave espresso mass purveyors like the person serving it. Christie has her own take on the small shop: "This place is the heart of the community."

Opened 19 years ago by affable Larry Paggi, Funky Java is not glamorous or chic. The décor is anything but sleek. Think of an offbeat coffee hut in San Francisco or a grunge hangout in Seattle. But the strip mall coffee shop epitomizes a neighborhood gem that has succeeded in winning the hearts, as well as the discriminating taste buds, of local residents.

Funky Java is a magnet for groups of co-workers and circles of friends. A group of ministers meet here on Tuesdays. On Fridays it’s retired athletic coaches. Elmhurst College students wander in.

Figure 4.2 Brewpoint featured in West Suburban Living
Figure 5.1 Yelp: Brewpoint amongst the Chicago suburbs’ best woman-owned businesses

Figure 5.2 Yelp: Brewpoint amongst Chicago suburbs’ best woman-owned businesses
Fundraiser at Brewpoint Coffee Company

March 27th
12pm-4pm

Present this flyer at Brewpoint in Elmhurst to ensure that 10% of your purchase will be donated to Alpha Phi Omega

Figure 8 Community involvement and donations
Figure 9 Facebook event for Game Night at Brewpoint
Figure 10 College student discount
Figure 11 Cupping class at Brewpoint

Figure 12 #NotAfraidtoLove campaign hosted by Brewpoint
Figure 13 Whole Latte Love campaign
Figure 14 #NotAfraidtoLove Campaign in partnership with Sprudge
Figure 15 ACLU benefit in partnership with Sprudge
Figure 16 ACLU fundraiser
Appendix F

Photography Reference

Our Story

Angelo and I, Melissa, started Brewpoint Coffee in all the wrong ways. We would like to say it was the result of careful planning, meticulous research, and proper education; but the truth is we weren’t even looking to buy a coffee shop. We were merely looking for an espresso machine on Craigslist when we stumbled upon this 121 W Park Ave location.

I had recently left my corporate job to do community work in the Philippines, and while I was there, Angelo encouraged me to do a risky thing: DREAM BIG. I took his advice, and in a very hot house in the Philippines, Brewpoint Coffee was conceived. The plan was to open in three years, but instead, three months later on September 2nd, 2014, we opened our doors.

Everything Brewpoint is, is an excuse for community. It’s not just about good coffee for us. It’s the fact that through great coffee we could have a foot in the door to build up those around us to form and support lasting partnerships, and inevitably provide fantastic service. These are things that both Angelo and I could devote ourselves to wholeheartedly. Fast forward to the present, none of this would have been possible without the major support of family, friends, and now our regular customers. We are blessed many times over and are excited to live out the coffee shop dream.

Image 1 Brewpoint’s Story
Image 2 Storefront at Park Ave. and Adell Pl.
Image 7 Café preparation area

Image 8 Back café area
EXPAND YOUR MIND

Thirst was made for water; inquiry for truth. - C.S. Lewis

There is no passion to be found in writing for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living. - Nelson Mandela

We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope. - Martin Luther King Jr.

The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is to not give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; that is to say, make him think things for himself. - George Bernard Shaw

One’s philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes, and the choices we make are our responsibility. - Eleanor Roosevelt

What does love look like? It has the hands to help others, the feet to hasten to the poor, the eyes to see the misery and woe, and the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. - St. Augustine

Without silence, words lose their meaning.

One’s Destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things. - Henry Miller

~ Henri Nouwen
Image 11 pastries, menu, and coffee bar

Image 12 Merchandise
Image 16 Angelo, the menu, and the weekly tip battle

Image 17 Friendly chatting at the counter