

## How Prolific's free pre-screening feature helped Copenhagen Business School empower cutting edge research into social enterprise.

Theodor Vladasel is a PhD student in Economics and Management at Copenhagen Business School. He studies entrepreneurship and social enterprises (i.e. organisations trying to achieve social goals through business means). Theo's research explores the balance between prosocial and commercial goals in such organisations, trying to understand how employees spend their effort when multiple important tasks are competing for their attention.



*"Being able to timely and accurately collect a large experimental sample of 800 subjects, was one of the reasons why we chose to carry out our study on Prolific."*

**Theodor Vladasel**  
PhD student at Copenhagen Business School



## The Problem

Social enterprises tend to attract socially-oriented employees, who, despite good intentions, often spend more effort on prosocial tasks than commercial ones. This can reduce financial performance and endanger the enterprise's long-term survival. Keen to make improvements in this area, Theo hypothesised that employee focus might be improved if the incentive structure around commercial tasks was changed.

The problem, however, is that social entrepreneurs can be reluctant to use money to reward performance because they see it as characteristic of for-profit ventures and opposed to their company values. This means Theo needed solid empirical evidence to prove that financial incentive could be a useful tool in a social entrepreneur's management toolbox.

Because obtaining observational data was really hard, Theo and his team opted for an experimental approach. They used Qualtrics to build an online experiment in which participants were shown descriptions of social enterprise firms and several commercial and social tasks they could undertake. By manipulating the financial incentives attached to each task, Theo could assess how money affected the way participants' allocated their effort.

The only snag was that they needed a sample of 800 participants to reflect concrete evidence. And not just anyone: they needed people who were actively engaged in the labour market and living in a country where social enterprises were well established.

## The Solution

On Prolific, Theo found not only the sample he was looking for, but a suite of tools to help him set up his study exactly as he wanted.

He used Prolific's prescreening functionality to filter the participant pool down to his specific audience, and set up two studies so he could collect equal numbers of men and women. Having built the experiment in Qualtrics, integrating it with Prolific was "effortless", and responses were soon flooding in.

It took less than a day to get 800 responses from Prolific's engaged, attentive participants. Paying them was easy, and Theo made extensive use of Prolific's bonus payment feature, issuing substantial financial incentives (up to £80!) to participants based on their choices in the experiment. This ensured that even in an online experimental setting, the participant's decisions carried real economic weight.



## The Upshot

Once Theo and his team had analysed the data, they found that financially incentivising commercial tasks did help to shift participant effort away from prosocial goals, resulting in a more equal allocation of effort. Surprisingly, this was the case even when the incentives were modest in size!

Theo's findings from Prolific show that good old-fashioned monetary rewards can complement motivations of social enterprises. By highlighting the tasks most important for the organisation's success, social enterprises can ensure a balance between social good and business longevity.

This is just one example of the ten of thousands of studies that have been run on Prolific. This is just one of Theo's many research projects too, as he continues to rise higher and dig deeper into the determinants of entrepreneurship in his new role as Assistant Professor at Universitat Pompeu Fabra. We wish him the best of luck.

Check him out! Or [read the preprint of the study](#) discussed above.



*"Overall, I'm happy with my experience and already planning to use the platform again."*

**Theodor Vladasel**