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## ON THE TEMPORARY ORGANIZING OF ENTREPRENEURIAL PROCESSES: APPLYING A PROJECT METAPHOR TO THE STUDY OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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### INTRODUCTION

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In this article, we intend to contribute to the development of constructionist perspectives on entrepreneurship by outlining a view of entrepreneurial processes as temporally, spatially and socially distinct interactions – metaphorically, as projects. More specifically, this will be done by revisiting and developing our earlier research on the application of a project-based view of entrepreneurship (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003).

As an academic field, entrepreneurship contains several different basic perspectives and schools. One of the founders of the field, Joseph A Schumpeter (cf. 1947) went into disciplines such as history, economic history and sociology in his life-long development of entrepreneurship theory. As of today, entrepreneurship is still studied within several disciplines such as economics, sociology and economic

history (cf. Busenitz et al., 2003). Within business studies, entrepreneurship research is primarily inspired by approaches from sociology, psychology and micro-economics, resulting in a focus on identifying, predicting and stimulating entrepreneurship (cf. Aldrich and Baker, 1997; Venkataraman, 1997; Busenitz et al., 2003).

Given this multitude of scientific roots, identifying entrepreneurship as a phenomenon and/or creating clear boundaries of the academic field are important but not straightforward tasks (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Busenitz et al., 2003). Consequently, there has been an ongoing debate for several years concerning the content and direction of entrepreneurship as a discipline in which current definitions, concepts and methodologies have been questioned (see Davidsson et al., 2001). In general, this questioning implies critical views of how entrepreneurship is defined and understood (Carsrud et al., 1986; Gartner, 1988, 1990, 1993; Jones and Spicer, 2005), what kind of methodologies that are used in research (Gartner and Birley, 2002) and what theories are used and how they are used (Zahra, 2007).

There is also a wide range of established theoretical and empirical explanations at different levels of analysis, from the psychological micro-perspective explaining the traits of successful entrepreneur, to the economic macro-perspective, explaining the policies and incentive structures needed to increase entrepreneurial activities in society (Davidsson and Wiklund, 2001). While most of this research is focused on one level of analysis there is multi-level research that tries to combine individual and context (cf. Aldrich and Martinez, 2002); some claim that multi-level research is a distinct feature of entrepreneurship in relation to the general management literature (Busenitz et al., 2003). In the current debate, many emphasize a general need to study social networks and entrepreneurial processes beyond individual entrepreneurs and their created organizations (Van de Ven et al., 1999; Davidsson and Wiklund, 2001; Gartner, 2001; Ucbasaran et al., 2001; Bruyat and Julien, 2001; Gartner and Birley, 2002; Fletcher, 2006; Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007).

In this article, our aim is to build on constructionist perspectives on entrepreneurial processes by outlining a view of such processes as temporally, spatially and socially distinct sequences of interactions – metaphorically, as projects. Our point of departure is our earlier research on the application of a project-based view of entrepreneurship (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003). What

was then a suggestion to study entrepreneurial processes through a lens focusing on collectivity and temporariness of the entrepreneurial act, has now evolved into a constructionist perspective where the project metaphor is applied in order to create a multi-faceted view of how entrepreneurial processes are organized. Since the 2003 paper, we have also used the perspective in a series of empirical studies of entrepreneurial organizations (cf Crevani et al., 2007; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006a, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009) that is currently subject to a series of publications intended to develop new theoretical understandings of entrepreneurial processes.

The article will be organized in the following way. First, we will discuss what requirements one may have on a research perspective in entrepreneurship studies, based on the observation that such discussions are often missing in scholarly entrepreneurship texts. Then, the basic ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions of social constructionism and the process thinking in entrepreneurship studies will be described. In a following section, the notion of the project metaphor will be discussed, and a basic outline of the empirical studies will be made. The essay will end by a series of empirical/theoretical themes emerging from the analysis of the empirical data – what will we see when applying the project metaphor to the study of entrepreneurial processes?

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## **1 - ON THE LACK OF BASIC ASSUMPTIONS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH: A CRITIQUE**

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Despite the apparent multi-facetedness of contemporary entrepreneurship theories, the field (i.e. papers presented at core conferences and published in leading journals) often seem to agree upon *how to theorize*, which is manifested in a lack of argumentation for new and/or existing research approaches with reference to basic philosophical assumptions on science (Aldrich and Baker, 1997, Grant and Perren, 2002; Pittaway, 2005; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009). From our point of view, the major problem with mainstream preoccupation with deductive, quantitative, hypothesis-testing research is thus not these methodologies as such. The problem is that the lack of explicit discussion on underlying basic assumptions in entrepreneurship research tends to imply an un-reflective attitude to the hidden claims and perspectives following from use of these methodologies. Behind the well-known set of statistical methodologies in the social sciences there are several unarticulated assumptions about ontology, epistemology and ideology that are

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actually problematic when applied to empirical entrepreneurship research. These assumptions – overlooked in order to make the phenomenon of entrepreneurship possible to investigate by means of the taken-for-granted methodologies - depict entrepreneurship as a logical mechanism in society that are caused by some variables and affecting others, thereby severely reducing the complexity of society and the economy. A dualistic world is assumed, where entrepreneurs, opportunities and technologies exist independently of each other. Likewise, entrepreneurs and their social interactions are reduced into simplistic models of psychological traits, rational decision making and economic exchange, and the entrepreneurial enterprises are rarely considered in research until they become registered firms and thus visible in official statistics. When successful, this research arrives at clear conclusions about correlations and cause-effect-relations in a much simplified world, conclusions that allegedly make it possible to predict and stimulate the entrepreneurial *homo economicus* into further bold endeavours. Such knowledge is also presented as neutral and objective, free from any disturbing interaction between researcher and the subjects of study. The process of producing scientific knowledge thereby borrows legitimacy from the reality-depicting, truth-seeking natural sciences, when the major theoretical foundation on which it is built actually belongs to the - highly political, almost religious – *laissez-faire* economics taken-for-granted in Western capitalism.

To sum this up, most scientific discussion in the entrepreneurship field addresses different theoretical, practical and methodological problems in existing literature without questioning the basic assumptions behind these problems. We therefore would like to see a scientific debate on entrepreneurship research that relates to the view of reality and human beings (ontology), the view of knowledge (epistemology) and the views of what is good/legitimate and bad/illegitimate research (ideology) that always underlie all scientific inquiry, explicitly or implicitly (cf. Burrell and Morgan, 1979, Grant and Perren, 2002; Pittaway, 2005; Steyaert, 1997). One research perspective in the social sciences that has relevance to entrepreneurship research and that has developed such thorough paradigmatic assumptions is social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1985, 1999). In other social science fields such as gender studies and organization theory, this view is commonly accepted as one of the major research perspectives (Gergen, 1999).

## **2 - SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND PROCESS THINKING IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP STUDIES**

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In relation to mainstream perspectives in entrepreneurship, *social constructionism* is explicitly based in a hermeneutic tradition where there is no knowledge beyond individuals' subjective and inter-subjective interpretations of reality. This ontological position is based on a rejection of the idea that true, objective facts and laws on human behaviour can ever be formulated or that societal processes can only be interpreted on how people construct and understand their reality and actions (Cunliffe, 2008). Man and reality are thus seen as inseparable and ideas, thoughts and actions are thus the result of ongoing processes of interactions and interpretations between human beings. In these processes, language is also subjectively and inter-subjectively understood, negotiated and re-formulated. Different approaches of social constructionist views can be found in literature; except for explicit constructionists like Berger and Luckmann (1966), there are also other examples such as Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology, Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism and Derrida's (1998) poststructuralism. The differences between the approaches usually concern research interests and levels of analysis creating tensions such as subjectivism versus inter-subjectivism, positive versus critical views, and macro versus micro process analysis (Cunliffe, 2008). From our point of view, these differences does not make social constructionism less useful as a basic perspective in entrepreneurship research – rather they underline the importance of carefully formulating the basic assumptions behind any research endeavour.

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## 2.1 - ON ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY AND IDEOLOGY/AXIOLOGY

The *ontological* position of social constructionism as applied to entrepreneurship is that entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs are subjectively and inter-subjectively understood by human beings. People can be regarded as active in the sense that they interpret and construct reality at the same time as these interpretations and constructions usually take place within the taken-for-granted boundaries of institutionalized cultural norms (Giddens, 1984). This implies that entrepreneurship and/or entrepreneurs exist through the interpretations made by individuals, groups of individuals and different cultures in society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This also means that what and who are included and/or excluded in/from these conceptual categories may vary depending on which group of people you ask. Entrepreneurship as a scientific field is thus also seen as a social construction based on a set of inter-subjectively shared beliefs amongst practitioners, policy-makers and scientists, rather than as a set of laws and

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indisputable truths (Astley, 1985). Examples of such popular – but still often implicit – beliefs concern where to find entrepreneurship (certain sectors and industries in the economy), what entrepreneurship means (starting firms and making them grow fast), who is an entrepreneur (a charismatic man) and the mindset of that entrepreneur (risk and achievement orientation). This socially constructed field is constantly constructed and re-constructed as policy-makers change their ideological and legal views, scientists develop new theoretical notions and initiate new lines of inquiry, and practitioners launch new enterprises with different degrees of awareness of how policy-makers and scientists perceive their enterprising.

In entrepreneurship research, social constructionism is often closely related to a process ontology, according to which the world is constantly in ‘becoming’ by means of social interaction. Reality is never existing in any ready-made sense, ‘being there’ for us to discover and analyse – it is instead constantly emerging through events in our social life worlds:

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“Reality can then be seen as a succession of alternations of events, where each event contains a possible synthesis of previous events, but where other events can also be formed on their own. Reality propels itself forward through events. [...] An event is a world in itself, which integrates the previous world in a particular way and allows a “growing together.” Every existing entity unites the multiplicity of the world and thus creates identity and meaning out of its relationship with other entities and parts. Conversely, new possibilities come into existence out of “that which has become,” and the created event becomes involved with what is in turn being created anew, creating yet another new event.”

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**(Steyaert, 1997: 20)**

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In entrepreneurship research, the social constructionist process ontology implies a view of entrepreneurship as something constantly in emergence through series of social events. It is not a predictable and controllable series of events, however, it is rather a ‘never ending story’ of interactions that may take any imaginable or unimaginable direction. According to Steyaert (ibid.) the entrepreneurial process is therefore also a creative process, as life worlds are constantly created anew through interactions taking place on the boundary between the past and the future (cf. also Spinoza et al., 1997). We will return to the notion of entrepreneurial processes in

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the next section, as it is also directly linked to the project metaphor suggested here.

This ontological position directly influences the view of what knowledge about entrepreneurship means and how such knowledge is produced, that is *epistemology*. From a social constructionist perspective, knowledge about entrepreneurship is knowledge on how individuals and collectives perceive, define, produce and re-produce entrepreneurial action in society. Scientific knowledge on entrepreneurship is thus produced through articulating and understanding how these individuals and collectives – subjectively and inter-subjectively - construct their entrepreneurial actions as unfolding processes (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009; Fletcher, 2006; Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007). Given that entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs are socially constructed concepts it is therefore meaningful to create knowledge on the interaction processes in which the concepts are produced and reproduced (Steyaert, 1997). In this interaction process, questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ is in focus, primarily from the aim of understanding. Entrepreneurship research usually implies normative questions like why and how opportunities arise, why and how some people are able to exploit them, and what the consequences are of this exploitation to individuals, stakeholders and society (Venkataraman, 1997). A social constructionist perspective would instead imply descriptive/interpretative inquiry into how and why opportunities, entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial processes and entrepreneurship are constructed in social interaction between people. It also implies that it becomes of less interest to make deductive studies with fixed operationalised concepts since knowledge and concepts are created in interaction between people and their interpreted environment. With this view on entrepreneurship, knowledge cannot be seen as objective and true, but rather as inter-subjective constructs.

Given the assumption that neutral, objective truth is not a relevant criterion for judging knowledge on entrepreneurship, otherwise implicit – and *ideological/axiological* - dimensions such as how we legitimize our research, our view of ethics, the role researcher plays in the reporting act, should have to be made explicit (Hosking and Hjorth, 2004). Established definitions, research questions, methodologies and theories on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs will thus be seen as the result of a process of institutionalization and theory development will consequently imply critical questioning of these institutionalized beliefs. Since we have an institutionalized view of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs as desired phenomena in society, entrepreneurship theory can in that sense be seen as an inclusive/exclusive construct that affects general views of what is entrepreneurship

and what is not, who is an entrepreneur and who is not. The importance of research thus also will have to be judged against how we can challenge institutionalized barriers in our way of integrating theories (Grant and Perren, 2002; Holmquist, 2003), find new methods for research (Steyaert, 1997; Steyaert and Bouwen, 2000; Gartner and Birley, 2002; Johansson, 2004), find entrepreneurship in new contexts and identify entrepreneurs outside current research populations (Cornwall, 1998; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003).

**Table 1 - Entrepreneurship as social construction: Basic assumptions and consequences (after Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009)**

<b>Ontological position (view of reality)</b>	Entrepreneurship is inter-subjectively interpreted and constructed in social interaction between people. It emerges continually as a social process through series of events.
<b>Epistemological position (view of knowledge)</b>	Entrepreneurship research aims at creating understandings of how and why actors engage in the social construction of events. Knowledge on entrepreneurship represented as narrative, discursive and textual data.
<b>Ideological position (view of what legitimize research)</b>	Researcher participates in construction of theory and practice. Awareness and responsibility required of researchers, as they are co-constructors of entrepreneurial processes and of cultural notions of entrepreneurship in society.

Social constructionism is thus about pluralism in entrepreneurship research; it acknowledges different meanings about entrepreneurship, provides knowledge about interaction processes and describes complexity. For us, this means questioning prevalent definitions, methodologies and operationalisations of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in order to re-construct entrepreneurship theory and arriving at new research questions. This implies a changed focus in the view of entrepreneurial subjects, from single individuals to actor networks and teams (Ben Hafaïedh, 2006; Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007). As discussed above, it will also mean a focus on the study of entrepreneurship as longitudinal processes of social interaction, and it should have consequences for the theoretical frameworks and use of theories in entrepreneurship research. A social constructionist research agenda should also imply new ways of finding entrepreneurial processes and to employ qualitative fieldwork methods.

## 2.2 - TOWARDS PROCESS STUDIES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The notion of a process view of entrepreneurship is extensively discussed by Steyaert (1997). He traces it back to the process philosophy presented by Alfred North Whitehead (1929) who viewed reality as ‘constantly flowing’, developing



through the creative construction of newness through endless series of social events. When reviewing recent developments in entrepreneurship research, Steyaert finds several streams of thought pointing in this direction. He quotes Van de Ven (1992) who claims that a Schumpeterian research agenda requires research approaching innovation.

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“...(1) as a dynamic evolutionary process, (2) in which many actors (including entrepreneurs) undertake time-dependent sequences of activities and events, (3) which produce cycles of discontinuity (punctuated disequilibria) and continuity (convergent equilibria), and that (4) both create and are constrained by different hierarchical levels of the social system”

**(Van de Ven, 1992: 218).**

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Steyaert also finds other examples of theoretical constructs pointing in the direction of a process ontology of entrepreneurship, for example Gartner's (1985) view of new venture creation, the need for an organizational emergence vocabulary (Gartner, 1993), and the notion of situated entrepreneurial events occurring over time through social interaction (Bygrave, 1993).

From our perspective, the entrepreneurial process is also a constant series of events in which people in interaction handle boundary situations; future and past, ‘we’ and ‘them’, ‘actual’ and ‘possible’, and so forth. Individuals and collectives define themselves - and are defined by others - in relation to general expectations on how to behave and think. When doing and thinking differently, people usually combine such general expectations with new ideas and perspectives, constructing both sensibleness and strangeness (Spinoso et al., 1997) where the sensible links back to the taken-for-granted past and the strange to a future of possibilities. We therefore claim that the entrepreneurial process can be characterized as boundary work, i.e. identifying, challenging and sometimes breaking institutionalized patterns, to temporarily both belong and deviate from what is taken-for-granted in the actors' social and cultural setting (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006a). This boundary work must of course also involve influence and include others in society (e.g. people, organizations or societies). If ‘successful’, the entrepreneurial process is temporary in the sense that institutionalised patterns are articulated and changed, and that the relevant context moves in the same direction as the process (Spinoso et al., 1997; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003). This does not mean that all entrepreneurial acts will be ‘exceptional’ on a macro-level – Spinoso et al. (1997)

repeatedly maintain that entrepreneurship is about history-making in a local/cultural context.

Given this notion of what the entrepreneurial process is about one might of course object that all sorts of acts intended to deviate and change institutionalized action patterns in society could then be subject to entrepreneurship inquiry (Baumol, 1990; Rehn and Taalas, 2004). It could also be discussed whether empirical phenomena where almost no identification, challenging and deviation from institutionalized action patterns in society take place should be included in 'definitions' of entrepreneurial processes (which is increasingly often the case in the public debate, where all sorts of admirable phenomena tend to become associated with entrepreneurship). From our point of view, studying small businesses started as followers in established industries might not always qualify as entrepreneurship research: it is important to evaluate the newness of the process in the local/cultural context. The field of entrepreneurship does not exist 'out there' as a ready-made set of theories and objects of study; it is constantly constructed and re-constructed by the scientific community. All new inquiry will therefore be judged against the existing literature, and subject to critical evaluation. Any re-constructor(s) of the field will operate under the same conditions as any real-life entrepreneur – assuming the risk of deviating from current practices also means assuming the task of convincing the context of the advantages of newness.

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### **3 - TOWARDS A PROJECT METAPHOR IN THE STUDY OF ENTREPRENEURIAL PROCESSES**

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During the last decades, projects have become a common form of work organisation in all sectors of the economy. One reason for this development is that many products and services have become so customised and complex that their execution demands an unique sequence of actions, another that the increasing pace of change in society results in an abundance of change and development reforms in organisations (Ekstedt et al., 1999). An increasing number of firms become "project-based", i.e. firms where almost all operations are organized as projects and where permanent structures fill the function of administrative support (cf Cicmil et al., 2009; Whitley, 2006).

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The basic reason for this diffusion seems to be that the project – viewed as a task specific and time-limited form of working – is perceived as a controllable way of avoiding all the classic problems of bureaucracy with which most "normal"

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organisations are struggling (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006b). The project is seen as a promise of both controllability and adventure (Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002) and as a necessity when the complexities and uniquenesses of contemporary organizations are to be handled (Cicmil et al., 2009). In that sense, project-based work is a part of the wave of new 'post-bureaucratic' organisational forms that has entered most industries during the last decades (cf Hodgson, 2004; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006b).

From a constructionist perspective, the project concept is of course a metaphor; a meaningful concept that we use in order to make sense of our life worlds (Hodgson and Cicmil, 2006; Pellegrinelli, 2010), a performative concept that we reproduce in daily displays of rationality, efficiency and professionalism (Hodgson, 2002). It is explicitly used to label what is going on in such diverse organisational contexts such as innovation, R&D, construction, consulting, European Union framework programmes, and so forth. When labelling events and practices around us as 'projects' we bring in experiences, expectations, concepts, attitudes, etc. related to project management. Projects has been promoted as a powerful and widely-applicable vehicle for integrating diverse functions of an organization, enabling the efficient, timely, and effective accomplishment of goals through the concentration of flexible, autonomous, and knowledgeable individuals in temporary teams. Project management and projects have seemingly been accepted by many both within and outside the field as natural, self-evident, and indispensable, established as homogenous, universal and distinct phenomena – despite the actual internal variety (Cicmil et al., 2009).

What we want when suggesting the project as a core metaphor in our study of entrepreneurial processes is of course not to bring in normative expectations or prescriptions on rationality, plannability, controllability, etc. into our inquiry. The point of the project metaphor is neither to make entrepreneurial processes subject to project management tools and models, nor is it to describe and understand these processes as precisely planned action sequences. What we want is to be able to view entrepreneurial processes as discontinuous, discernible and disaggregated series of events – as co-constructed by involved actors as limited in time, scope and social involvement. Our interest is not to squeeze entrepreneurial processes into the project management toolbox, but to be open for the possibility that actors experience these processes as somewhat more episodic and compartmentalized than just as passing moments in the stream of consciousness – in line with Steyaert's (1997) suggestion to focus process studies on series of events. The project

metaphor thus enables us to see entrepreneurial processes in terms of temporary organizing processes and to theorize upon how and why interactions unfold as they do.

**Table 2 - Entrepreneurship as temporary organizing processes: Some suggestions for empirical research**

<b>Study focus: Entrepreneurship constructed in interaction</b>	People constructing social processes intended to articulate, challenge and break established patterns.
<b>Theory development: New theories and concepts</b>	Additional theories and concepts (i.e. identity theory, culture theory, gender theory, critical management theory)
<b>Empirical fieldwork: What to study</b>	Formal and non-formal projects created out of pattern-breaking ambitions
<b>Fieldwork approach and methodologies</b>	Researcher as a part of the processes (and thereby the results). Participative observation, in-depth interviews, stories, ethnographies, narrative analysis, deconstruction, discourse analysis

Consequently, one important aspect of our suggested perspective is to study entrepreneurship as temporary organising processes (Packendorff, 1995; Söderlund, 2000). Such an analysis is not confined to entrepreneurship studies only – on the contrary, temporary organizing processes tend to occur everywhere in society (Miles, 1964) – but it presents entrepreneurship studies with a much needed temporal aspect. Lundin & Söderholm (1995) suggest that such temporary organising involves four sub-processes that all goes on throughout the project but with shifting importance for understanding daily action; action-based entrepreneurship, fragmentation for commitment-building, planned isolation, and institutionalised termination. The first process is most important in the beginning, when the idea-generator(s) try to gain support for the new idea and start to construct a social network for its subsequent realisation. Thereafter, the idea is transformed into a practical ‘project’ through a process of ‘fragmentation.’ This means that the project is mentally ‘carved out’ from the everyday flow of events through including and excluding tasks, time periods and people (this is necessary for making the idea real, but it also means a risk that actors attracted by the idea find its concrete ‘operationalisation’ unattractive). After this, the project goes into a phase of ‘planned isolation’, i.e. the implementation of the identified tasks during the identified time by the identified participants. The project team here organises itself as a somewhat detached unit, working hard against deadlines and budget restrictions – with the obvious risk of becoming too detached, too concerned with establishing unpermeable boundaries and thus subject to inertia. When

approaching the end of the organising process, it is again ‘opened up’ to the rest of the world with a hope that the results will now be found worthwhile. At this stage, the actor network de-couples itself as individuals go back to previous activities or to new actor network densities elsewhere. Some of the actors might work together again in new entrepreneurial acts, while others remain at distance (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003).

It is not easy to say exactly when an entrepreneurial act is ‘over’. Indeed, organizations can be seen as constantly changing (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997) and the notions of ‘before’, ‘during’ and ‘after’ thus as *post-hoc* rationalizations sprung out of the established punctuated equilibrium paradigm. Still, the notion of temporal boundaries in entrepreneurship studies seems relevant as we are focusing on organizational emergence rather than going concerns (Gartner, 1993). Our suggestion would be that it is over when the actors have sorted out all the matters that made the entrepreneurial act specific in the first place. In the words of Spinoza et al. (1997), the act/temporary process starts as an anomaly in a local/cultural context and is over when history has been written in that very local/cultural context – when the entrepreneurial act has gained acceptance and not seen as an anomaly any more. Then the actor network may of course introduce new anomalies and initiate new entrepreneurial acts – thereby also keep the organization innovating and developing. Usually, this would imply that the act is over when the target market has been reached (the Schumpeterian notion), but in cases of social entrepreneurship matters of acceptance and the dissolvment of the boundaries between the actors and the target market would be important aspects (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006a). Starting an entrepreneurial act often imply setting up boundaries between the actors and the rest of the local/cultural world, and ending the act would imply the dissolvment of at least some of these boundaries.

A second aspect of the project metaphor is the choice of settings for empirical fieldwork. One problem of putting a view of entrepreneurship as boundary-challenging social processes into practical field research is still to know when and where these processes actually happen. This is a similar problem to the well-known difficulty of identifying entrepreneurs and successful firms before they are established (Davidsson and Wiklund, 2001). One suggestion is to focus empirical inquiry on different sorts of projects intended to be entrepreneurial and/or innovative – such intentions are usually made explicit at early stages in projects (Holler, 1999; Clarysse and Moray, 2004). Projects are thus seen as temporary structured processes of social interaction intended to contribute something new to



the environment from which they once emerged (Ekstedt et al., 1999; Hitt et al., 1999). One should of course be aware that the formal project period does not encapsulate the whole process (idea generation often precedes the formal project and diffusion into the environment often happens much later) but that is different from project to project. In the case of art projects, most of the creative work happens within the formal temporal boundaries of the project, while many other projects do not start until the whole process has been thoroughly planned.

As subjects of study, projects share the advantage that they are clearly delineated efforts to identify new ideas, get things done and work in closely coupled teams (Hitt et al., 1999). By studying these kind of events it should also be easier to delimit the entrepreneurial processes in a practical way. Many existing operations on the market were originally developed in temporary processes within and between organizations; processes that still exhibit all requisites of entrepreneurship such as new ideas, action-orientation, followers, etc. (cf. Clarysse and Moray, 2004). When the entrepreneurial act is over, i.e. when the novelty or innovation has reached its market, the process is over and its result diffused into its context for further exploitation (Ekstedt et al., 1999; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003). Moreover, in some cases, non-entrepreneurial processes are used as ‘windows of opportunity’ that some people in the organization exploit in order to implement controversial ideas. While the result of the process lives on, the process itself ends and the team is scattered – and, perhaps, partly reassembled after a while to construct new processes together.

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## 4 - EMPIRICAL FIELDWORK – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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The empirical studies reported here was made with a narrative approach through individuals’ stories about entrepreneurial processes that they have been part of. During the last decade, the narrative approach has been taken far beyond its origins within the field of literary analysis (Boje, 2001; Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001). Human beings have been exposed to numerous different, sometimes contradictory and competing, discourses. Thus, the narrative on the personal work life episodes can fill a sense-making function for both individuals and their social contexts. Recent developments in the use of narrative methods have stressed the importance of making a distinction between narratives and stories and taking into consideration what happens before a narrative (Boje, 2001). A story can be seen as an account of incidents or events, and a narrative comes after. “Story is an ‘ante’ state of affairs

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existing previously to narrative; it is in advance of narrative. Used as an adverb, ‘ante’ combined with narrative means earlier than narrative” (Boje, 2001: 1).

This implied that individuals were asked for their spontaneous story on their life including both work and life in general within the current organization. These interviews were recurring in the sense that we revisited the organizations several times, and they lasted for about 1 - 2 hours with each person. In the end of every interview, we spent some time to clarify details and critical incidents in their stories. Out from our theoretical preconceptions, we had identified some themes to be covered by their stories: their view of how their organizations had developed, by who and how leadership was exercised, how actors came together in the organizing of events, how actors in the organization lived their life both at and outside work, and how their actions was regarded both inside and outside the organization. After transcribing the recorded material, we extracted different narratives linked to the ongoing production and reproduction of leadership in project-based work by means of thematic analysis. Boje (2001) described thematic analysis out from deductive and inductive approaches; in this case, it has been a combination of these two approaches where a number of general theoretical themes have formed a framework for the inductive extractment of specific narratives. Inspired by Martin’s (2001) method, we have emphasized narratives concerning the ongoing organizing of events and the links to the local/cultural context. We took a special interest in contradictions, competing discourses, and critical incidents in the interviews (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001). The empirical material is organized along different narrative themes that that were extracted given this interest.

The empirical material of this paper was taken from four different organizations that were studied as examples of new leadership practices in emerging industries in Sweden. Two of them are independent schools (schools financed by municipalities but run by private organizations or individuals), one is a private theatre, and one is a rock festival that has grown into a small music industry corporation. The cases, all made anonymous for this presentation, are summarized in Table 3.

### **Table 3 - Summary of the Empirical Case Organizations**

Organization	The Svensson School (TSS)	Louis High School (LHS)	Rocktown Forest Festival (RFF)	The Here and Now Theatre (HNT)
Operations	Independent school in medium-sized town for children 12-15 years old.	Group of four schools in a large city, of which three are high schools.	Rock festival, restaurants, education, production, marketing, venture capital.	Private theatre company specializing in improvised theatre. Plays, company gigs, course programs.
History	Founded 1994 as a company. Co-owned by founders until 2003. Now owned by a private person.	Founded 1993. Operates as a private trust, no individual owners. High-profile board.	Founded 1981 as an open music club. Today, the club owns several companies. Partial bankruptcy in 2010, festival re-started 2011.	Founded 1989 as a theatre club. Restarted in 2002 as a company after bankruptcy.
No. of employees	60	100	50	7 (+ 30 freelancers)
Managerial structure	Two married founders, of which one is the headmaster.	Two founders who work with strategic development. Schools led by headmasters.	Collaborative structure with boards, management groups, networks. Informal core of co-founders.	Five co-owners, of which one is theatre manager. Groups and committees.
Study focus	Start process.	Start processes for each new school.	Start processes for festival and several of the companies.	Start and re-start processes.
People mentioned here	Roger (founder, CEO, owner) Angela (founder, headmaster, owner)	Camilla (founder) Nancy (founder)	Pete (co-founder, group CEO)	Nathan (co-owner, theatre manager)

*Note.* The names of the involved organizations and interviewed individuals are all fictitious.

## 5 - TEMPORARY ORGANISING OF ENTREPRENEURIAL PROCESSES: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

In this paper, we will not make a ‘thick description’ of each case or substantiate our claims through presenting raw data in the form of quotations from the interviews or descriptions of participant observation situations. For such in-depth empirical material, we kindly refer to our earlier publications where the same data set has been subject to analysis (cf Crevani et al., 2007; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006a, 2008, 2009). What we will do is to discuss what can be learnt and understood where entrepreneurship is concerned, when applying a social constructionist perspective and a project metaphor. In this section we will give four examples of empirical patterns and themes that emerged in the analysis of our four case

organizations.

The first theme is concerned with the relation between permanent organizational settings and the temporary entrepreneurial processes that takes place, a quite common theme in project studies (Ekstedt et al., 1999) but less so in entrepreneurial contexts. The second theme relates to patterns of interaction in temporary entrepreneurial processes, where both similarities and differences can be found in relation to established project work models (cf Lundin and Söderholm, 1995). Thereafter, we look into the performative expectations on an individual visible entrepreneur – which is an aspect where entrepreneurial organizing differs from team-based project work. Finally, we discuss the notion of boundary construction – temporary processes both implies boundary work in relation to the permanent organisational setting and to the local/cultural context in which entrepreneurial processes are instances of history-writing (Spinosa et al., 1997).

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### 5.1 - PERMANENT PLATFORMS AND TEMPORARY ORGANIZING PROCESSES

A first theme is that of ‘stable’ organizational or societal arrangements as ‘platforms’ for the organizing of entrepreneurial events. When the actors describe their work they tend to relate stories of all sorts of critical incidents – ideas, ventures, projects, efforts, events, crises, reorganisations, bankruptcies. It seems that entrepreneurial actions are limited in time and space to the episodes where important problems and opportunities are defined and handled, and that everyday routine work takes place in between these episodes. Entrepreneurial processes can thus be conceived of as temporary densities in otherwise loosely coupled actor networks, and they are not limited to the initial starting of the organisation only (cf Gartner, 1993).

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In the case of the Svensson School (TSS), Roger and Angela were able to build up a quite large school in short time, having planned the start process in a meticulous way. They had experience of pedagogy, accounting and management, and spent large parts of the process building social networks with actors that could influence the possibilities of starting the school. When the school was up and running, there were no further radical changes made, although there were some minor crises and development projects. Instead, Roger and Angela organized new entrepreneurial processes related to the school, such as participating in the creation of the Swedish Association of Independent Schools. When they decided to sell the school and retire, they also launched a new housing concept for senior citizens, in which they

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invested the entire revenue from selling the school.

In the case of Louis High School (LHS), Camilla and Nancy experienced almost the same process as TSS when starting their first school. The same organized planning, the same focus on network building. An important difference was that neither Camilla nor Nancy had any pedagogical experience, which meant that they had to employ professional headmasters for each new school, leaving them with time and resources to initiate new entrepreneurial processes together with their growth-oriented board of directors. So they started two more schools, bought a third, and created a recruitment and staffing company for the local school market. In all these cases, the existing operations with its acclaimed staff and excellent reputation were a major asset. The main problem was the financial aspect of growing, as the existing schools did not generate much profit that could be invested in new ventures.

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The most evident example of the permanent organisation as a basis for new entrepreneurial events is the Rocktown Forest Festival (RFF). Based in a non-profit music club, created to supply its members with concerts by their favourite artists, the actor network has started international festivals, restaurants, educational centra, media companies, business incubators, new music clubs, and also a couple of large center projects. The financing of these activities has been a constant problem, but they have developed an internal expertise in orchestrating complex projects that is an important foundation to stand on each time. In some of the projects, they have relied on established actor sets, i.e. groups of individuals with previous experience of collaboration and with clear roles in relation to each other. But the club has also a tradition of being a 'hotel for souls of fire', open to young, creative people with ideas and energy. RFF helps them with support, a social network and a desk to sit at – the rest is up to the emergent actor set crystallizing around the newcomers.

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The most project-based organisation in the empirical study is The Here and Now Theatre (HNT), where most of the ongoing operations is explicitly organised in terms of standardised projects. At the same time, they constantly have to be creative and open to internal debate in order to maintain its reputation as an innovator in the local community of performing arts. The permanence of HNT is mostly a matter of identity, co-ownership and physical location, however, as the organization does not have a sound financial basis and is forced to create new projects all the time in order to survive. The entrepreneurial capacity, on the other hand, is deteriorating: if radical projects, such as moving to a new location, are

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needed, they would not have the necessary experience to lead them by themselves.

The organising of entrepreneurial events or projects is also a process clearly circumscribed by the basic values of the organization and the local/cultural context. In both the schools, the core values are made explicit and there is a widespread agreement on these. Core values are an integral part of school leadership since long, and they are also supported by the professional values of the teachers.

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In RFF, the situation is different. The number of influential actors is much higher, and they are distributed across the organization. The basic agreement that RFF is devoted to music and a non-profit ideology is constantly challenged as new actors and project appear – for example through the gradual increase of commercial business thinking in the organization following the establishment of incubators and new companies. While there might be a low degree of inter-subjectivity concerning single projects (such as university educations, incubators and feminist hard rock clubs) it is possible to have a divergent organisation as long as all new ideas can be related to the core values. In those cases where new projects have challenged the core values – which has happened at least twice in RFF – serious organizational crises with long-lasting conflicts have followed.

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## 5.2 - PATTERNS AND MODES OF INTERACTION

What is also interesting for the study of entrepreneurial processes is the varying patterns of interaction and collaboration that constitutes the entrepreneurial events. Entrepreneurial events happen in different constellations and with different intensity, and it is not possible to discern any general patterns of interaction in a preliminary analysis. What can be noted is the richness in interaction patterns and modes that can be found in this empirical material.

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Concerning TSS, the venture is closely tied to Angela's and Roger's personal values and lifestyles. As a married couple, they did everything together from the start in close interaction, where after they gradually assumed different roles in the management of the school. Angela is the formal headmaster with her background as a teacher, and Roger takes care of administrative and legal matters based on his experience from industry. They can still cover for each other when necessary, and they also make joint efforts to anchor the school in the local community. The school is to live on long after their personal departures, so it is important that it can exist independently of the founders. Angela and Roger only want to run the school as

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long as it supports their own personal life choices – they do not think they would do a good job if feeling that the school is a burden or sacrifice.

In the Louis High School group, the two founders Camilla and Nancy has worked very closely together already from start. Most of their daily work is about communicating the core values of LHS, recruiting and introducing key personnel and making sure that each school is a functioning, independent unit. Camilla and Nancy have offices next to each other and continuously discuss matters throughout the days. For a period they had offices at different schools, but they soon moved back together as their mutual communication deteriorated. They want the LHS to give something to everyone; it is a long-term responsibility that involves students, parents and local community. Ideas are often discussed back and forth, but they soon get the feeling that they have now reached a mutual understanding and can the move on quickly to get result. The sense of energy, excitement and sensibleness is central to them – they work by personal relations and do not move on until they feel that everyone involved is ready and necessary resources are secured.

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The RockForest Festival collective has a long history – many of them are friends since childhood. They want to do fun and somewhat spectacular things together in a playful and rebellious manner. Idea generation is important to them, and they have designed their workplace to make it possible for people to meet and move on with their projects – every project idea has a ‘passing moment’ after which it may be impossible to gather all the people and resources needed to implement the idea. They are proud of what they create and they want to show it to the world. There are often disagreements on various projects, and the usual solution is that everyone go for the projects they believe in. At the core of RFF is the founding team, now extended by a few newcomers, that plays an informal but central role in the overall direction of the organization. The direction of RFF is the sum of all projects, and if you want to make your project take off you will have to go through someone among the founders. Some of them are visible actors, adopting project ideas and spreading the word, others take the role of identifying opportunities, collecting information and build external networks. What is not allowed is to act as a boss, telling people what to do – such individuals will soon get abandoned in RFF.

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At the Here and Now Theatre, everything is teamwork. You cannot rehearse, practice or perform improvised theatre on your own. This has also come to characterize the management of HNT, which is done collectively in an ever-changing set of meetings, project teams, committees and work groups. The only

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thing handled individually is administrative matters, but the co-owner taking this responsibility is continuously struggling to involve the other co-owners in this work as he wants them to understand HNT as a business, not only a performance group.

In general, interaction patterns tend to evolve over time as different actors assume different roles in the organizations – a parallel process of formalisation (Sölvell, 2008) and ideation. The roles need not to be based in traditional or formal competences, they are often the result of projects implemented and chance encounters – a project can thus be seen as a process where individual actors discover things about themselves and each other, resulting in new and changed roles assumed. The initial interactions in the entrepreneurial events are often very close and without any visible division of work, later on more clear roles tend to emerge. The basis of these open-ended interaction patterns is always the core values.

In all cases, ideation work is done with total openness – they continuously discuss their ideas with others inside and outside the organisations. Some of the discussion partners are consciously chosen with future decisions and resource needs in minds, but others may just be ‘innocent bypassers’ happening to be in the vicinity. The discussions lead to ideas being more concrete or being adjusted, but also connected to other ideas and projects. Ideation work is also characterized by generosity – if you share your ideas, others will share theirs with you – and a conviction that no one can implement an idea in the same way as yourself.

When having decided what to do, the work is characterized by an internal focus – creating something that can be shown to the world and thereby propelling the project further on. Another common characteristic is the absence of traditional boundary thinking – you can always learn from everyone, and when choosing your network partners you look for similar core values rather than asking what industry sector they are in or what market they are targeting. The boundaries set are therefore related to values – such as achieving a high degree of legitimacy in the school system or preserve the RockForest brand of being non-profit music rebels.

### **5.3 - LIVING UP TO EXPECTATIONS: DELIVERING THE HERO ENTREPRENEUR**

An interesting observation is the perceived need to live up to institutionalised expectations on delivering a single, entrepreneurial hero. In all four cases, there is an understanding that the local/cultural context expects “an entrepreneur”, “a

founder” or “a leader” that can personify the organization and communicate its values. The Svensson School is named after Angela as she wanted to communicate her personal values as the foundation for the school, and in RockForest Pete has been recognized as a successful entrepreneur on a national level. In the daily operations they still try to appear as a team, which has implied that Roger and Angela is a well-known couple in their hometown just as Camilla and Nancy has become somewhat famous for launching LHS. In RFF they actively try to specialize different actors towards different sectors of the environment, which is a way of involving more people in networking and getting feedback. Using a rock metaphor, they see the respective contact persons as ‘lead singers’ with the rest of the band closely behind.

The choice of ‘lead singers’ is often instrumental. Angela is used in TSS in her role of headmaster and CEO, Pete in RFF as being the CEO of the main company, and the respective headmasters in the LHS group represents the individual schools. In RFF they based their choice on Pete’s obvious talent for handling media, and in TSS Roger soon realised that a school could only be legitimate if represented by an educated teacher. What is interesting is that in all these three cases, the organizations conformed to the classical entrepreneurship notion of a single, visible entrepreneur as a powerful symbol.

In the case of HNT the absence of a single entrepreneur can be explained by reference to the cultural context in the theatre world – usually, actors become famous rather than theatre managers. They have not seen any need for a visible entrepreneur. Although Nathan has a special responsibility to interact with corporate customers, based on his experience as a business consultant, he is not intentionally chosen to symbolise or represent HNT in general. On the contrary, the internal discussions have been concerned with the need for the other co-owners to go beyond their artistic work and take responsibility for the external profiling of the theatre.

#### **5.4 - ENTREPRENEURIAL BOUNDARY WORK: ON DIFFERING, BELONGING AND SYMBOLISM**

A final understanding that we will mention here is that of entrepreneurship as working the boundaries between the sensible and the strange (cf Spinoza et al., 1997). Given the importance of core values it does not come as a surprise that all four organizations work hard to load themselves with symbolic content –

expressing values and attitudes beyond the practicalities of daily operations. It is a work that builds identities both internally and externally, relating to the outer world both in terms of differing and belonging (cf Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006a). Parts of the symbolic production has thus come to emphasise how they differ from expectations, e.g. on how entrepreneurs, headmasters, rural youngsters and cultural workers should think and behave. The more they differ from these expectations, the stronger the need for symbol production, it seems.

In TSS, the initial process was one of constructing a sense of belonging between the school venture and the local community. Angela and Roger were new in town, and they wanted to make their school welcomed as a valuable addition to the local public sector school system, not as an intrusive competitor. They launched a number of activities intended to gain acceptance for themselves and for the idea of a school with a cultural profile, e.g. promoting the school as a non-profit company, choosing a legal form that allowed full transparency to outsiders, and offering parents the possibility to buy shares in the company. Thereby, the school was constructed as a part of society rather than a matter of their personal business interests.

The Louis High School was launched in an affluent suburb in which independent schools was not seen as a controversial phenomenon. Instead, the founders focused on in what way the school could make a difference, which they did through the school's aesthetic profile and high academic ambitions. As the group grew, the founders also had to work inwards to develop the organisational culture by emphasising inter-school collaboration, teacher autonomy, bilingual teaching and the integration of aesthetic perspectives into all subject areas. Externally, they promoted the LHS as a competent organization at all levels, a haven of professionalism and individual freedom. By time, LHS gained a reputation as an 'elite school', which they tried to play down by stressing personal development and inner harmony as the main outcomes of high school studies.

RFF has always seen the production of symbols and meanings as a central aspect of organizational development. At first, they wanted to deviate from the traditions of a small industrial town by establishing themselves as a bunch of punk rebels. As their operations grew and they became husbands and family fathers, they gradually came to the insight that more could be achieved if they also established a sense of belonging to the town. They have thus constructed an identity as "useful rebels" who - based in local values such as altruism, local patriotism and egalitarianism -



paves the way for the town by being creative, challenging and professional. The balance between differing and belonging is not an easy one to maintain, and it also requires that the view of the organization as poor, precarious and struggling must be sustained. A central part of the flow of symbolic production is the ever-growing number of brands, slogans and projects – and the awareness of the demand for visible entrepreneurs such as Pete.

Similar reasoning can be found in HNT, especially in its humoristic marketing of a new theatrical form seriously concerned with current trends and problems in society – they are a committed and joyful part of local community at the same time as they are a poor outcast in a landscape of large, public sector-financed theatre houses. Internally they also sustain this balancing between differing and belonging – they want to combine theatre and business in a creative manner, convincing a sceptical world on a new and exciting way of conceiving of theatrical performance.

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## CONCLUSION

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In this essay, we intended to contribute to the development of constructionist perspectives on entrepreneurship by outlining a view of entrepreneurial processes as temporally, spatially and socially distinct interactions. We have discussed the basic assumptions of a constructionist, process-based ontology where entrepreneurship emerges through series of events, and we have identified the theoretical and practical consequences of applying a project metaphor to the study of such series of events. We have also pointed at a number of empirical themes from our previous empirical studies that emerged from the application of the project metaphor.

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In this final section, we would briefly like to comment upon the theoretical consequences of these studies for future research. One important challenge for entrepreneurship research is to widen the field through reflective inclusion of theoretical bodies from other fields (Zahra, 2007). Entrepreneurship in theory and practice has already borrowed from fields such as leadership and management (Busenitz et al., 2003) – a trend clearly visible not least in the field of corporate entrepreneurship or intra-preneurship (Stevenson and Jarillo, 1990). Interpretive organizational change theories in general can thus be useful, both as sources of complementary perspectives to consider in the analysis of entrepreneurial processes, and as inspiration on how to intervene into these processes in empirical

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fieldwork. Depending on what ideological assumptions underlie each specific inquiry this can then be further developed through other concepts/theories. Both gender theory and critical management theory can be useful tools for understanding problems and conflicts within processes in terms of power relations and conformity to institutionalized action patterns. Likewise, theoretical bodies such as organizational culture and identity construction may contribute understandings of how people involved in entrepreneurial processes relate to each other and how the process affects their views of self (Downing, 2005; Mills and Pawson, 2006; Down and Warren, 2008; Jones et al., 2008). Moreover, there are other complementary theories/concepts that should also be of interest, such as social movements, teamwork, ethics, professions, leadership, organizational politics and historiography. In our own studies, we have found theoretical inspiration from fields such as leadership (Crevani et al., 2007), identity theory (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2008), the concept of power (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2005), and project management (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003).

One clear example of a theoretical field that has been partly included in entrepreneurship theories is gender as social construction (Calás et al., 2009). Questions concerning how culturally constructions of gender, ethnicity etc are related to the social construction of entrepreneurship on a societal level and how this affects unfolding entrepreneurial processes, has been emphasized. Like CEOs of large corporations, entrepreneurs are individually recognized as masculine super-human leaders and heroes (cf Chell, 1996; Drakopolou Dodd and Anderson, 2007; Ben Hafaïedh, 2006). The problem is that it depicts entrepreneurship as something for a select group rather than as a possibility for everyone in the same way as leadership theory tends to view leadership as an activity for a chosen few (Ogbor, 2000; Crevani et al., 2007). Research has pointed towards that definition of entrepreneurs are gendered: the individual should possess certain (masculine) characteristics (Ahl, 2006) and/or start a new firm. Besides widening the empirical basis of research on entrepreneurship by acknowledging more acts as entrepreneurial acts, this also means that more individuals are acknowledged as entrepreneurial.

From a social constructionist perspective, people always have the potential to re-construct their identities, their capabilities and their lives – which means that it should be uncontroversial to acknowledge entrepreneurship as a future possibility for anybody. Most individuals never see themselves as potential leaders and/or entrepreneurs, thereby participating in the institutionalization of the concepts as

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excluding the many and including the few. Therefore, we need an image of entrepreneurship conveying a multitude of different ways of living and working; thus also a multitude of entrepreneurial identities (Berglund et al., 2007; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2008). Through using theories from other fields, we may be able to view the actions and contexts of entrepreneurial processes in new and different ways, and this will contribute to the development of the field of entrepreneurship.

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***In this article, we intend to contribute to the development of constructionist perspectives on entrepreneurship by outlining a view of entrepreneurial processes as temporally, spatially and socially distinct interactions – metaphorically, as projects. More specifically, this will be done by revisiting and developing our earlier research on the application of a project-based view of entrepreneurship (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003). We outline the basic ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions of social constructionism and process thinking, whereafter the notion of the project metaphor as a basis for studies of entrepreneurial temporary organizing processes is discussed. Examples of empirical/theoretical themes emerging from the analysis of the empirical data from four case organisations are presented.***

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social constructionist perspective

project

process and entrepreneurship

critical management theory