

Constructing Agency in Entrepreneurial Process

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Key Words: agency; entrepreneurial process; new venture creation; narrative; qualitative; processual

Abstract

Objectives: Entrepreneurs are the interpretive agents (Gilbert-Saad et al., 2018) in the new venture creation process. Hence, studying how individuals make sense of themselves during the process enables to address how action is produced by the entrepreneur (Read et al., 2009). Processual approach enables studying entrepreneurs' learning (Cope, 2005; Jayawarna et al., 2013), and hence, we try to understand how individuals in entrepreneurial process construct themselves as agents in self-directed and -regulated courses of action (Bandura, 2006; Jones, 2019) close to the moments when the outcomes of action takes place. Accordingly, our research question is *how individuals engaged in entrepreneurial process construct their own agency?*

Prior Work: In entrepreneurial process the actors, individuals, decide to take action to create something new. Unique feature in this process is the agency according to which individuals perceive being in charge of the process. Agency is related to the sense of control over individuals' decisions, actions, and outcomes (Baum et al., 2014). However, research has focused on the qualities of entrepreneurs, but this does not enlighten us how individuals perceive their agency when action actually unfolds. Instead, in this study, we apply a relational and social conception of agency and pay special attention to temporal construction of agency in an entrepreneurial process (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Flaherty, 2002; Hitlin & Elder, 2007b). Analytically, the study conceptualizes "the self" as an agent; the way a person perceives in a given moment themselves in relation to others and the world affect how they construe being an agent and also influences on how they act (see Harré, 1998).

Approach: We use a novel empirical approach of video diaries (vlogs) produced by students participating in a 14 week long new venture creation course. We use vlogs as personal and experiential narratives and focus on the talk (transcriptions). Drawn from the literature, we pose three questions to the research data: 1) how the narrators assume power and exert influence over actions and events (Riessman, 2001); 2) how the narrators interact and socially position themselves with other agents (Davies & Harré, 1990; van Langenhove & Harré, 2005; Reynolds & Curtin, 2008; Eisenhardt, 2013); and 3) what is said about entrepreneurship and what kind of meanings are given to entrepreneurship (Riessman, 2008; Bruner, 1990; Steyaert, 2004). We focus on vlogs produced by two vloggers, one of which who had an initial idea at the beginning of the course and another without an idea. In answering these questions, the vlogs are also timed with the guided entrepreneurial process at the course.

Results: Our results highlight the way the vloggers constructed their agency through idiosyncratic and recurring talking points which presented discrepancies between what is ideal and what is really happening during the entrepreneurial process (Riessman 1993). These tensions highlighted differences in constructing agency between the vloggers in terms of four dimensions including: *temporal telling* (short term telling when lacking a business idea; long term telling with a vision of a business), *individual learning goals and commitment* (less power over events without commitment; more power over events with commitment), *social positioning and comparison* (negative appraisal in comparison to others caused negative emotions, positive appraisal caused positive emotions), and finally, *necessary knowledge and skills* (negative appraisal caused by perception of failing; positive appraisal caused by acceptance of one's capabilities).

Implications and Value: The paper contributes empirically demonstrating that the perceived agency seems to transform over time, but importantly our findings address how to individuals cope with negative aspects of the new venture creation process. These findings imply that the production of entrepreneurial behavior is a complex bundle of motivational and emotional factors that are conceptualized as relational and social issues. Moreover, as much of agency debate is theoretical; our study provides novel empirical findings on the human side of agency. The paper makes also methodological contribution by employing approach that produces rich data on agency and enables investigation the processes of sense making during the moments of change in and/or between educational interventions designed to support the entrepreneurial process.

Introduction

Making sense of what entrepreneurs do has directed the entrepreneurship scholarship for years (Gartner, 1988; Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011). Studying entrepreneurial process is one way to address how entrepreneurs produce opportunities and actions (Read et al., 2009; Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011). In these processes entrepreneurs operate as interpretive agents (Gilbert-Saad et al., 2018). Processual approach also enables studying entrepreneurs' learning (Cope, 2005; Jayawarna et al., 2013) and recognizing the development of (in)efficiencies (see Pret et al., 2015). In entrepreneurial process the actors, individuals, decide to take action to create something new that is imagined of creating significant value for others (Lackeus et al. 2019). Unique feature in this process is the agency according to which individuals perceive being in charge of the process. Agency is related to the sense of control over individuals' decisions, actions, and outcomes (Baum et al., 2014). Hence, agency is strongly linked to personal dimensions, such as values, aspirations, self-confidence, and identity (Bandura, 1989), and it is a deeply emotional action taking, aimed to change something that one truly cares about into a better state (Lackeus et al., 2019).

However, research has focused on the qualities of entrepreneurs, but this does not enlighten us how individuals perceive their agency when action actually unfolds. Thus, instead of focusing solely on individual's qualities, it is essential to understand how individuals in entrepreneurial process construct their own agency, the self-directed and -regulated courses of action (Bandura, 2006; Jones, 2019), close to the moments when the outcomes of activity unfolds. Accordingly, we investigate through an inductive and constructionist approach individuals' interpretations of their actions and how they create their own world through the "narrative mode of knowing" during entrepreneurial process (Bruner, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). Our research question is *how individuals engaged in entrepreneurial process construct their own agency*.

In order to achieve this, we employ narrative analysis (Riessman 2001) to talk in video diaries (vlogs). We collected data from students, who participate in an experiential entrepreneurial process during a new venture creation course. Despite the richness of video data, in this study focus solely on the narratives of individuals and apply a relational and social conception of agency and pay special attention to temporal construction of agency (Emibayer & Mische, 1998; Flaherty, 2002; Hitlin & Elder, 2007b). Analytically, the study conceptualizes "the self" as an agent; the way a person perceives in a given moment themselves in relation to others and the world affect how they construe being an agent and also influences on how they act. (Heinz, 2002)

This novel approach enables us to study the processes of sense making that are mobilized at the moments of change in and/or between educational interventions designed to support the entrepreneurial process. Moreover, as much of agency debate is theoretical, our study provides novel empirical findings on the human side of agency. Our results show that perceived agency transforms over time, but importantly the findings also illustrate how to individuals cope with negative aspects of the new venture creation process. Similarly, the studied narrative constructions of agency reflect the positive and negative emotions felt during the new venture creation process. Accordingly, our study brings up novel insights to the understanding of how entrepreneurship is produced during entrepreneurial process.

Theoretical background

Entrepreneurial process is defined as a complex bundle of consecutive stages and events ranging from idea conceptualization to implementation of that idea. These events are shaped by multiple personal attributes, social, organizational and environmental factors that influence the stages of entrepreneurial process over time (Bygrave, 2004). This and similar models have guided researchers to investigate the qualities and competencies of individuals in charge of the entrepreneurial process. By approaching entrepreneurship as a method (Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011) and sense making (Weick, 1995) we address the development of engagement in entrepreneuring (i.e. negotiating, networking, testing assumptions, making decisions, pivoting, etc.) to create new economic and social value (Rindova et al., 2009). As entrepreneurs' judgment is, beyond rational considerations, underpinned by subjective processes, such as imagination, creativity, and intuition (Packard, 2017), making sense of the entrepreneurial process requires making sense of the actor, individuals, and her behavior. Sense making is a process through which individuals work to understand novel and confusing cues from their environment, and which involves the active authoring of events and frames for understanding (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). These aspects provide a building block for our study on agency and how individuals create their own world through the "narrative mode of knowing" during entrepreneurial process (Bruner, 1991).

To fully understand the complexities of agentic processes, we use *temporal* construction of agency with its *relational* and *social* conceptions and link them to actions. Hence, agency is seen within the process of social engagement that provides a context for the action and its interpretation. (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Flaherty, 2002; Hitlin & Elder, 2007b). In this we conceptualize "the self" as an agent and fit a person's lived realities and different action possibilities with their self-conception (see Harré, 1998). As identity is commonly understood as

a socially occupied position, “the self” defines how people perceive themselves. Although what a person’s talk of themselves does not directly reveal their “self”, it indicates their will to position themselves to others and to the world. (Bamberg, 2006; Davies & Harré, 1990).

Theoretically studies using social and relational conception of agency connect with individual-level social psychological constructs, such as self-efficacy and planful competence. Self-efficacy is a person’s perception of their capacity of action (Bandura, 2001) while planful competence is self-confidence to make rational and realistic decisions (Clausen, 1991). Despite not being a capacity, self-efficacy regulates our aspirations and choices for behavior, because we must believe in our own capabilities to have control over our own actions and external events (Bandura, 2001). Without efficacy beliefs, we lack incentive to take action. Furthermore, through self-reflection people can evaluate the meaning of their lives, values, and motives (Bandura, 2001). Self-concepts supporting positive appraisal of one’s capabilities allow for both longer endurance and supporting longer-term goals. Repeated successes of efficacious actions also enhance self-efficacy. For this reason, our sense of ourselves as causal agents is not based merely on the reflection of others, but also on our own self-conceptions and experiences as causal agents (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). This relates to the necessity of reflective and integrated agency; it is not possible to make choices unless we know “who” we are or the “future person” we are making plans for (Mackenzie, 2008:p. 9).”

Data and methodology

Data collection

Our data were collected from students participating in a bachelor-level new venture creation course which is organized together among four Finnish higher education institutions (HEI). The course attracts annually about 40–60 students from participating HEIs. The average age of participants is 26 years, 55% are females. Students are not required to have any prior business experience or a business idea, although about ¼ of them have some experience in entrepreneurship (Renko & Stenholm, 2016). The study context provides a setting during which students are exposed to new venture creation process in an experiential learning environment (Pittaway & Cope, 2007). These sorts of courses reflect a real-life entrepreneurial context which allows and requires both individual and group-based learning (Harms, 2015). By adopting Kolb’s (1984) model of experiential learning, new venture creation courses put students to learn from action (Pittaway et al., 2017). The extant literature on entrepreneurial learning suggest that students without a venture lack some important learning aspects that are experientially gained through working in one’s company. However, such course may still provide them with different other learning outcomes (Cope, 2011; Pittaway et al. 2017). For instance, students may learn from their own experiences or from the social interactions between individuals (Haneberg & Aadland, forthcoming) even if the intended learning outcomes are not reached (Ilonen et al., 2018).

As an experiential course it is marketed to students in all fields as an opportunity to test entrepreneurship in practice and to get involved with hands-on activities and to become a good idea developer and team player. Hence, the course strives to develop both entrepreneurship personalities and future entrepreneurs by allowing them to act in real business context. (Cope & Watts, 2000; Jones & Ireland, 2010; Gibb, 2005; Heinonen & Hytti, 2010; Kyrö, 2005; O’Connor, 2013; Pittaway & Cope, 2007). During the course the students craft and test business ideas, and find suitable business models for setting up a business, and thus, the course employ lean startup methods (Eisemann et al., 2011). All activities are conducted in multidisciplinary teams with from two to five students at least from two different faculties or institutions. The course lasts for 14 weeks and it begins with a day-long boot camp where students form teams and initiate idea generation process. Thereafter, teams and teachers meet every second week. For these joint course meetings students are given assignments that reflect the steps of new venture formation, such as idea validation, marketing, conducting competitor analysis, and estimating the financials (Reynolds & Curtin, 2008). Students decide the actions and outcomes of the assignments, but the learnings from them are shared in the meetings. As an experiential and practice-oriented course, it does not involve traditional teaching methods, but teachers act as mentors to support the learning process. Moreover, the evaluation of the learning is based on self-assessment and team’s progress during the course.

Data were collected from four volunteering students during the course in spring 2019. They were provided written instructions, which guided them to reflect their own and others’ (other students and the course mentors) actions with a video that lasts at minimum ten minutes. They were asked to create vlogs after each joint meeting in order to produce a continuous flow of reflections. Vlogs were introduced to them as an opportunity to freely reflect (i.e. produce narratives) course experiences, and hence, they differed from traditional reflective learning diaries (Dyment & O’Connell, 2010). The vlogger accepted easily the idea on producing vlogs that has become a common way for individuals to share different aspects of their personal lives in the public sphere. They uploaded the videos to a secured cloud service, and in this context, however, vlogs were private and procedures for maintaining confidentiality of the study participants included assuring that the vlogs would not be viewed by other than the authors.

In this study we analyze and present two of them that entered the course with differing intentions. Hannah (name changed) is a community pedagogue, who entered the course without a business idea. Violet is also a community pedagogue (name changed), but she had a business idea. Hannah and Violet worked in different teams throughout the course and their paths do not cross in their vlogs. Both the narrative content and the way of recordings were made revealed some mundane everyday aspects of student life. The study participants recorded the videos in different ways, with their PC camera at home or while having a break at a temp job, and with a smart phone in a car while in transit. They also spoke about being tired, being worried about the progress of their studies and, on the other hand, trying to stay positive amidst of all what was happening in their lives. Violet produced five vlogs that varied between 11 to 30 minutes in length. Hannah produced seven vlogs, but they were shorter, all less than 14 minutes.

Data analysis and presentation

Conceptualizing self as an agent is discussed in the life course research (e.g. Flaherty, 2002; Hitlin & Elder, 2007ab; Heinz, 2002; McAdams, 2005; Macmillan, 2007; Sarbin, 1986). Accordingly, the narratives are used in studying how the self is retrospectively constructed in the timelines of meaningful events, appraisals of actions and their consequences in the social context. In entrepreneurship research narratives have opened up new avenues for recognizing that narrating or storytelling is important for startup entrepreneurs (Hjorth, 2007; Martens et al., 2007; O'Connor, 2004). Thus, in the interpretive entrepreneurship research, narratives have also allowed the study of entrepreneurial learning (see e.g. Rae, 2005; Rae & Carswell, 2001) and provided a fruitful platform for the critical reading of the stereotypical portrayal of entrepreneurs (see e.g. Campbell, 2004; Hamilton, 2014; Petterson, 2004).

Narrative data represent the efforts of the narrator to describe and interpret themselves and their experiences (Mishler, 1990), and reflect her emotions, goals, valuations, and judgements (Riessman, 1993; Sarbin, 1986; Feldman et al., 2004). Furthermore, narrative and the self as inseparable, for "narrative is simultaneously born out of experience and gives shape to experience" (Ochs & Capps 1996, p. 19). Narrated experiences are a form of self-interpretation (Mackenzie, 2008), where narrators strive to find coherent form of self-maintenance. Often, however, individuals "narrativize [...] experiences [...] where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society" (Riessman 1993, p. 3) bringing out tensions that are meaningful for the narrator. Narratives most commonly point to a bounded story that contains a succession of happenings, and where the narrator provides the setting, time frame, and characters for the storyline that forms a meaningful whole (Czarniawska, 1998). Hence, we see that narrativizing agency is an essential aspect of making sense of the self, but also how agency transforms during a new venture creation process.

Narratives can come in different forms. In this study, narratives are created by our study participants in verbal form in video diaries (vlogs). Hence, the original data are spoken and later transcribed verbatim. Atkinson and Coffey (2003) argue that talking about actions makes them understandable. This is important, as much of agency debate is theoretical and conceptual, instead of having an empirical side of human action (Anderson, 1997).

In the first phase of the analysis the first author screened both the vlogs and the transcriptions to form an overview of the data. The second author also read all the transcriptions independently. For the purposes of this paper, we decided to concentrate only on the text-based data in analyzing how agency is constructed in the entrepreneurial process. In order to synthesize different elements referred in the literature review, we posed three questions to the research data:

- 1) *How the narrators assume power and exert influence over actions and events* (Riessman, 2001)? The focus is on how active or passive the vlogger is (powerful vs. bystander vs. victim), and how active she is (subjective narratives vs. neutral narratives). The vloggers' self-conception indicates how they place judgments on the retrospective interpretation of their actions, whether or not they "see" themselves as active agents in their talk.
- 2) *How the narrators interact and socially position themselves with other agents* (Davies & Harré, 1990; van Langenhove & Harré, 2005)? Many entrepreneurial processes are conducted as teams (Reynolds & Curtin, 2008), and their success is related to diversity and how do team members get along (Eisenhardt, 2013), for instance. Hence, the analysis is concerned with whom or what does the vloggers interact with, how they position themselves with other agents, what kinds of interactions transpire between them, and what kinds of roles and parts are assigned to all agents.
- 3) *What is said about entrepreneurship and what kind of meanings are given to entrepreneurship* (Riessman, 2008). Bruner (1990) claims that individual narratives account for the unexpected or for exceptions that have occurred to rebalance with something that has been perceived as canonical and expected (Steyaert 2004, p. 20). Similarly, agency is delineated in the narrations as something the vloggers find important and valuable to tell, something that "stands out." In the analysis, we give

special attention to any concerns or worries related to entrepreneurship and any issues that the vloggers connect their emotions with.

The first author took the initial role in answering the three questions above per each video transcription by using an analysis table (see Appendices 1 and 2). The initial analysis was then commented and complemented by the second author. In answering the also timed the vlogs with the course process. Lastly, we analyzed first separately and then together all narratives chronologically to identify both constancies and shifts in the ways agency was constructed in the vlogs through the power, social positioning, and meanings given to entrepreneurship. In this phase, we were able to identify some overarching themes in the content of telling. Because each of the narrators' journeys are idiosyncratic, so are their repeating themes.

In the next chapter we will focus on the main talking points produced by Hannah and Violet. The presentation of the data is aimed at providing the reader an overall picture of main talking points starting from the first vlog and ending to the last. However, the presentation is not purely chronological nor focused on the steps of the entrepreneurial process, but instead focused on the repeating themes that highlighted the way the study participants' constructed their agency.

Results

Hannah with conflicting ideas

Hannah describes herself as strong, ambitious, and social. She likes independent work and gets along with everybody, and having fun. At start, she is slightly nervous, but very excited. She is relieved that girls she teamed up with are like-minded people. However, as a strong person she feels she should give space to others. At first, this does not happen, because she thinks she is more interested in the assignments than others while others "hang a long". She also credits the success of the first client encounter to her social skills and is positive about future assignments. Although Hannah claims that she has "not so much ideas", but more of "having an interest" [vlog 1] towards entrepreneurship, she thinks she has potential because of her family background.

I had heard so much good about the course and I had heard before the success story of Buglife [...] and that inspired me to participate to the course, where you really can succeed with a good idea. [...] Because I am from family of entrepreneurs, this is the thing I should get into and I have potential and social skills and so on. [vlog 1]

Buglife is an alumni company of the course and comes from food industry. It is considered by Hannah a success story, like few others that she mentions also in other vlogs. Reason to mention Buglife seems natural, because Hannah's team's initial business idea is food related. What is notable is that from the start, Hannah starts to talk about "succeeding" as a business and succeeding in the course, and hence, feels connection with a successful company. However, when describing her own team, she implies that expectations are low for the course. Her team consists of members who "share understanding" that they "dedicate time for this, but do not take stress" [vlog 1]. She defines the reason for not taking stress as none of them have "crazy business idea" [vlog 2]. Although Hannah continues to claim that they merely enjoy participating in the course, the lack of the business idea is becoming her biggest source of grief and it affects the way she sees herself in the course.

The way for Hannah to cope with no having a business idea is to talk about the course as if it was a play. For example, in vlog 2, Hannah tells that she and her team have been bouncing around ideas about food trends. Although they have been able to draft options and name the startup, Hannah makes it sound that they are not very serious.

We are interested in artisan sparkling wine, wild herbs and their use, French fries, turnip fries, horse bean hummus, alcohol yoga [...] And our first name is fun, Foodtrips, because we thought that if nothing else we take student loans and do food trips like Anthony Bourdain, tasting foods and bring them here. But it was a joke. [vlog 2]

Hannah continues later to clarify that she does not "have business in mind" and that the team has "health [in mind] and that is common to them" [vlog 2]. The "joke-like" name is also mentioned in Hannah's third vlog, where initial business ideas become to take shape and all startup teams in the course come together to present their ideas to each other for the first time. She has a "strong belief" that many of the teams have "good ideas" [vlog 3]. Of her own team she emphasizes a good atmosphere among the team and having "fun" and for example making "a fun video". [vlog 3] At this point, she also credits the course a few learning moments that have enabled her to see the importance of focusing on problems and not solutions.

There are moments starting from vlog 3, where a change in the attitude and confidence in Hannah's telling can be recognized. The changes related to her talks about how the team and herself are performing. While in vlog

3 she repeats not being “somebody who would stress about these things”, in the next, she has sank into self-condemnation and doubts her knowledge and skills.

I am so bad at these things. I am so practical that I don't bother throw around ideas in my head. I will never be what they are looking for here. To make charts and calculate potential revenue and blaa blaa and sales revenue and profit margins. I didn't graduate high school in time, because didn't have what it takes to know math, chemistry and physics. I don't have the perceptive skills. [vlog 4]

Behind all the fun and social aspect of the course that Hannah initially seemed to enjoy, more serious and concrete objectives become to emerge. Now, the name of the company has been changed into Food change referring to the change Hannah's team wants to instill in the world by developing sustainable food packaging to reduce plastic waste. At this point, unfortunately, her interest towards the course started fading. Hannah tells how her team shared their concerns to other teams about lacking the business idea.

Ann-Christine and I ranted about that we have nothing, we cannot create ideas from thin air. We started with a huge problem, waste in the world, well it was a “save the world” approach. Nothing but resentment came out of it when you listened to others' finalized things and they have business cards and demos and blaa blaa and everything. [...] We have nothing. [vlog 4]

Hence, social comparison decreases Hannah's motivation at the course at this stage and she started to see herself more as a victim as opposed to an independent student as described in the earlier vlogs. Moreover, she externalizes the perceived failures to the course content, structure, speakers and mentors. While in the beginning she thought the “course mentors are good, nice, multi-professional and excited” inspiring her and the team to work independently as she wanted [vlog 2] with “sensible doing” [vlog 3], now she claims the team needs “a little bit more motivation, inspiration and innovation”, because a startup “does not born just like that [vlog 4]. She also claims now that she has “learned nothing about entrepreneurship in this course” [vlog 4]. Because the mentors no longer seem to “push” them enough, she feels extremely down when the first pitching takes place and the team fails in it.

This is so laughable. [...] You must yourself in your own inferiority, because the others have good ideas. Only Softis team idea well they had idea, but they did not have execution [...] we had nothing. [vlog 4]

Softis is a team that develops products from hemp and shares similarities with Food change with regards to sustainable development. In Hannah's vlogs, Softis is mentioned again later as a “fellow sufferer” in vlog 5. Softis is presented as an example of not being able to fulfill the expectations set to the course at that particular point in the entrepreneurial process. Here, the references Hannah makes are no longer the achievers, but the losers. Hannah implies that success and linear progress is also expected from the part of “the audience”, the researcher.

We must be a really bad team to produce you these videos, but there is this point of view that nothing works and nothing interests in this course. [vlog 4]

In vlog 5 she also admits of being ashamed of her team's performance that she “chickened out” and decided to stay home eating cake while “two brave people had pitched” although they didn't have “anything to pitch”. Hannah also mentions a team member, who left the course “when she got something better to do”.

I do not blame her. [...] Even though she is a very innovative and eager and spirited and a marketing person, the course did not give her much use. That I can say on behalf of her. [vlog 5]

By talking about her team members Hannah reassures that there was not much to learn in the course to begin with. It is surprising that she continues to claim so since she has made in her previous vlogs positive appraisals of her team's and her own performance in different phases of the entrepreneurial process; she had earlier mentioned, for example, that she had learned how to identify problems. Now, it seems as if none of the idiosyncratic steps and skills learned in the course accounted for anything because of the lack of a good business idea.

There is a conflict in Hannah's telling with regards to the business idea. From the start, she shows respect to those that have great business ideas and have been able to take them into action. On the other hand, she explains that her own team has failed to progress, because they are “larping” [vlog 4; vlog 5] which means live-action role playing. Hence, the course is a game to Hannah and she is trying to solve in her talk the conflict between the game they are merely playing and the reality that others are able to take their actions into.

The conflict between game and the reality is demonstrated also at points, where Hannah talks about her intentions about entering the course. At first, she blames bad marketing and misinformation and claims that the

course was not marketed to her as an opportunity to create a real business. This causes her to regret missed opportunities. In the end, however, she assumes responsibility of her actions.

You do not know how much I would have wanted everybody [in my team] to be like "yes!". And I was in the beginning of our startup talking a lot with Evelyn in Fibre team about sustainable development. I would have hoped to be in a productive team, but I am happy that I did not choose that line and end up for example to Fibre, because I would not have had so much to offer... [vlog 6]

In the last vlogs where Hannah mentions Fibre – team that was chosen the best in the course – she finds ways to reconcile between the conflict by admitting that she and her team would not have what it takes to establish a startup. On one hand she thinks the process has brought out behavior that she thinks can change how her team members think of her. For example, she did not like the idea that she left the team down by leaving project "unfinished" referring to the fact that a startup was not formed and this "left a bit of a bad taste" in her mouth [vlog 7]. In the end of the last video Hannah quickly lists a few things she thinks she has learnt, but summing that that does not make an entrepreneur.

I know now how to pitch and I would like to do it well. [...] In the course I learned many things about entrepreneurship, financing, team spirit, encouragement, but also about my own motivation; it must be 100%, if one thinks of doing such things. [...] Nobody becomes a good entrepreneur with such a loose attitude. [vlog 7]

Hence, seeing the purpose of the course to establish a business made Hannah think she has failed. This inhibited her also to analyze the course contents from the more personal learning perspective.

Violet with a dream of an educational tool

Violet describes herself as a "leader type" [vlog 1] whose community pedagogical skills enable her to listen and communicate with others. When entering the course, she already has a vision of producing an educational game on substance abuse.

The dream would be a virtual game, where people would play with their avatars and there would be different types of characters with different risk and safeguard factors. And then they would play the life and [see] which decisions lead to what. But it would have a raising and educational aspect. That virtual game may realize not before we are millionaires. [vlog 1]

Since Violet already has an initial idea, she has framed the course as a "project" [vlog 1] in which she thinks the idea can be developed. First step would be an app and later a more sophisticated version would be done. Violet makes it clear that she is building the team around her idea and knowledge about substance abuse and that she is the leader.

My know-how is in work around substance abuse [...] that competence comes from me. And then running the business...I think based on what I have learnt now [from other team members] it will also be on me. But I do not mind, because I myself want to create this company in which I want employees. I enjoy this role. [vlog 1]

The idea of the game develops step by step as the course progresses, although Violet wishes it would progress more quickly. She is very systematic in planning and wants to see quick progress. She is particularly perplexed when the actual company is started. For example, in the first vlog, after course participants got to know each other and express their initial business ideas, she is already expecting concrete information about how to do the paper work to start a company, but is consciously pacing herself with the pace of the course.

I started thinking there is no point to do anything now, because we have not received any instructions, how to get a business ID and all this. So I hope all this information comes soon and after that we can really start shooting this thing. We should have logos and everything. [vlog 1]

In the second vlog, Violet starts the wonder, when the real action begins. At that point of the course the teams are guided to continue to identify problems in order to be able to narrow potential options down and eventually choose one to focus on. Violet thinks that they could just skip this and "cut to the chase already" [vlog 2]. She also ponders, if it all starts, when "the company name is put in put some startup registry" [vlog 2]. In the third vlog she still thinks that the "step-by-step" approach is just "churning and planning" [vlog 3] and hence too slow for her. She does not see any idea in testing and trying the idea, because her idea is already fixed. By the time we get to the fourth vlog, the course has already past its midpoint and Violet is satisfied that she finally gets some "concrete" information, regarding for example startup financing.

Although Violet seems straightforward in her approach and very eager to jump into execution, she is aware of potential challenges that could come her way to stir things up. Interestingly, most of the key issues she analyses and plans in her vlogs are not related to business, but to the team dynamics. More specifically, the development of the startup is entangled with lengthy discussions about the division of labour in the team that Violet “creates” [vlog 1] around the idea; team members’ commitment to the idea; the ownership of the idea; and finally, Violet’s role as the leader. On the other hand, Violet is less focused on reflecting on the idiosyncratic exercises and activities done in the course and very seldom makes references to them.

In vlog 1, Violet recruits members and envisions roles to each of them to support the realization of her idea, even those that do not have direct skills or interest with gaming. For example, a team member with language skills could translate the pitches, and later, also create the different language versions of the game. Hence, she stretches the roles also temporally to cover time period also after the course, when the realization game is realistic. Discussion about roles and division of labour is started in the first meeting, where the team talks about how the division of labour may vary during the course and that all should be okay by that. Violet has also asked the team members if they are in it “for real” [vlog 1]. Hence, the course is “work” [vlog 1] and she is hoping other team members also know this.

Let’s see how big of a shock it will be for them when they realize that “Damn this is real work”. We must have lighter meetings, where we can check the situation, but we also need real work days, where we brainstorm and plan. A few hours here and there and meetings in a coffee place is not enough. [vlog 1]

In the beginning of the course students are guided to get to know each other and identify their strengths. Violet speculates that some of the male team members have syndromes that limit their skills in social interaction (one participant has ODC and two other Asperger’s according to Violet), and, hence make co-operation challenging. She adopts a motherly role towards them and notes the course provides an opportunity to “raise them” [vlog 1]. Later on, however, she notes on several occasions that she does not want to be a “baby sitter” [vlog 1; vlog 2] or give them “just easy tasks” [vlog 2] that she potentially must do herself. On the other hand, she finds positive sides in the team members’ skills. For example, she thinks that team members’ ability to hyper concentrate on selected tasks is an asset that allows quick progress as long as she is “able to make the project so interesting that they would dive into it” [vlog 1]. She also sees the course as an opportunity for the team members to grow and develop new skills.

From the start, Violet assumes the role of a leader. Already in vlog 1, she lists activities that other team members do, “delegates tasks” and is “checking on situations”, i.e. she is coordinating. She also takes the lead by visioning a video the team is required to produce to introduce themselves. Later, she iterates similar, lengthy and detailed lists, what everybody is doing or how they should be doing. In all her vlogs, Violet’s telling is future-oriented. She recounts past events and extrapolates events for the future. For example, when she has realized that some team members might have challenges in containing themselves in presentation situations due to their social communication deficiencies, Violet makes plans on how to avoid possible problems in the forthcoming pitch.

Group work is challenging, when we have to make a presentation. And when we pitch and for example present to our mentor what we are doing. It has to be made very clear that “Okay this is our [...] strategy to present this. I will say this and after that it’s you, you, and you”. [vlog 3]

Violet is very committed to her idea and making it happen. All in all, the ownership of the idea and her position as the leader seem to be important to her. When Rachel, a new team member with business background joins the team in the second joint meeting [vlog 2], Violet wonders, if the member understand that it is her idea.

I do not know if she has internalized yet that I created a gang so that I can realize my own dream. That this idea is in my head. [vlog 2]

Reconfirming her ownership of the idea and her role as the leader, later “project manager” [vlog 3] continues in later vlogs and she is pondering if it must be officially reconfirmed and “verbalized again” [vlog 3]. Talk about her role as the leader is motivated by problems that have surfaced during the project. Violet doubts, if all respect her decisions or are committed to the startup. Violet recalls in the vlogs discussions and events with other team members and ponders, if they are interested in the startup or participate to the course for the 10 study credits the course is worth. This question becomes the source of all “drama” [vlog 3 and 4] with Rachel, who is the last member to join the team and is not delivering what she promised.

She does many things at the same time. In the last joint meeting [...] we collaborated with another team [...] and Rachel suddenly said [to the other team] “Well hey I can be your designer”. [...] And when I have listened to her how much other stuff she has going on I am now like “f***k”. Okay, well. With her it is probably ten credits, I think. But because of that I am afraid to give her certain tasks, if I cannot trust

on the commitment. [...] But I have to let it be and maybe when I do the division of labour I will ask her “In which projects are you now? What do you want to do? How much will you commit?” [vlog 3]

Drama with Rachel and others continues, when Violet does not see other team members follow her instructions of keep her in the loop of what is going on. Lines also start to crack, when her leadership is questioned in situations, where she is trying to adapt the advice from the speakers and mentors. For example, in vlog 4 Violet tells that they have received valuable information from an external expert and she would like to implement some of the ideas such as preparing a team agreement. However, she is disappointed that Rachel and John found the idea of the agreement redundant and self-evident. She, on the other hand thought it is absolutely necessary in situation, where many people seem to see things differently. She just wants to do it to “avoid drama” [vlog 4].

As further challenges arise, Violet thinks she has to “keep a tight lip” around Rachel and not to get visibly upset when their ideas clash. At this points, she already wishes Rachel would move to other team. She is feels Rachel is questioning everything she does. Rachel also exhibits patronizing behavior according to Violet by for example trying to explain her how to edit texts in Instagram. While Rachel has three Master’s degrees Violet has none. She also feels that there values differ from one another.

I have wanted to do it for years. I am afraid what will happen with it with Rachel’s and some other’s ideas. I brought it up in the beginning – granted she was not there then – I have recruited guys by [saying] “Hay I have this idea. Will you join me?” Everybody else are aware of this, but not Rachel. I have said it, but she is not listening or does not want to listen where the idea came from. [vlog 4]

Violet also thinks others do not understand the rationale of her systematic approach. She thinks others see her as “the bad guy” [vlog 4]. She is now also consider continuing alone and outlines options for the continuation.

A team update must be made then. What do they want from this? [...] If none of them continue after the course I will go alone to the Fast Accelerator Programme and find new networks and start finding a new team so that I can get the game done. [vlog 4]

By the time of the final vlog, vlog 5, the situation has finally resolved. Violet has been busy and three joint meetings have passed. The team has demoed their idea in an open event. A game engine has been built, but no graphics were made although it was the initial plan. The team is also starting to write the script. Violet has also made up her mind about the continuation; she will continue with one of the team members, Sam, and a new member from outside will join the project. She says all her worries she expressed in her previous vlogs came true. Because some of the team members will change, some of the materials will be done again. The name of the startup will also be changed due to why old material will no longer be valid. It appears the end has been amicable, and even Rachel sees it best that Violet is able to realize her own idea.

Like Rachel said “Now you can do it as you want”. And that is how it is. [vlog 5]

Violet remains forward looking in her plans. In the last vlog she plans the marketing and talks about school teachers, who are the main target group of the game. She notes that teachers, are tired of games, and therefore, the product will be called from now on “an interactive digital learning tool”.

In the end of the last vlog, Violet also tells that her father has passed away between the last two vlogs. She had mentioned about his illness also in the previous vlogs. She says her “resilience” has been tested during the course, but she was able to remain on the path despite it all.

Joint analysis of the results

Our findings suggest that during the entrepreneurial process individuals take different types of agentic positions in their talk and they use different kinds of elements in constructing and making sense of their experiences. This is demonstrated, firstly, in the differences in *the temporal telling* in the vlogs. For example, when the narrator has difficulties to form a business idea and lacks an overall vision, she portrays herself more as a participant, who is failing in the course. Consequently, she is focused on summarizing here-and-now course activities and exercises in her vlogs. Narrator with a business idea, on the other hand, analyses in her vlogs what has happened and extrapolates actions for the future. She is a future-oriented doer, who is able and willing to exert influence over events in the startup and is able to envision different possibilities for action. While doing so, she is less focused on talking about practical course steps, but instead reviews everything from the perspective how they support the realization of her business idea.

Secondly, the positions and roles the narrators assumed were related, to differences in their *defined individual learning goals and commitment*. More specifically, narrator who intended to use the course as a vehicle for realizing and testing their business idea assumed having and using more power over events in their talk and

vision possible and faster steps for action. At the same time narrator who considered the course as a form of play or collection of random exercises, was less coherent and detailed about the attributes of the business idea, the process and their own role in it. Her narratives emphasized external-to-them issues, such as lack of vision or objective of the end point of the course, for missing of wished goals during the course. Importantly, our results show that these positions fluctuated during individuals' entrepreneurial processes based on how individuals interpreted the experiences they had gone through although the narrator with stronger commitment was able to handle disappointments more constructive way without giving up.

Third, we also find that the narratives highlight also different *emotions*. One could clearly recognize expressions of joy and confidence, as well as self-doubt, shame and guilt. Intriguingly, these expressions changed over the course of actions. For example, reaching simple thresholds of success, such as deciding a name for the company/team, shaped the narratives positive. Negative emotions were brought up when the entrepreneurial process did not progress synchronously with the course program and other teams, for example, in preparing a demo. Similarly, challenges in idea development seemed to negatively shape the perceived agency. Hence, *social comparison in connection to temporal coupling with the new venture creation* affected their reactions, either by confirming their confidence or decreasing the confidence and made them questions their own and others (including own team and mentors) actions.

Fourth, narratives showed that there were differences in *portrayal of knowledge and skills* upon which the action was based on. More specifically, narrator failing in the course started to see herself lacking the needed skillset, because she was not able to reach the expected outcome of the course. Narrator with a strong vision for a business, on the other hand, recognized more realistically her own skills and shortcomings and actively pursued ways to find people with complementary skills despite the fact that a business was not yet established.

Implications and Value

In investigating the construction and development of agency our findings show that during the entrepreneurial process individuals' narratives show different types of agentic positions and different kinds of elements in constructing their experiences. They also reflect meaningful and idiosyncratic tensions that arose during the entrepreneurial process when the narrator experienced discrepancies between the reality and the ideal (Riessman 1993). Even if both narrators were team leaders, their expressions of their agency changed over the course of actions. In addition to the portrayed differences in necessary knowledge and skills required or different motivations of being involved in the new venture creation processes, our findings highlight the role of different emotions, such as joy and confidence, in the process. Similarly, negative emotions, such as self-doubt and shame, were highlighted. For example, reaching simple thresholds of success, such as deciding a name for the company/team, shaped the narratives positive. Negative emotions were emphasized when the entrepreneurial process did not progress with the course program and other teams. Similar situations have caused challenges in entrepreneurial decision-making (Ilonen et al., 2018). Our findings reflect the recent research that suggests the feelings individuals experience influence entrepreneurs' cognitive framework through which they make decisions (Baron, 2008). Success in these actions requires cognitive frameworks and "connecting the dots" (Baron & Enstley, 2006), but also gut feelings (Huang & Pearce, 2015) and emotions (Cardon et al., 2012) that influence decisions during the entrepreneurial process.

In addition, our findings illustrate that the positions and roles the narrators assumed were related, for example, to how they defined their individual learning goals and commitment for the course, and hence to establishing a startup. Importantly, our results show that these positions fluctuated during individuals' entrepreneurial processes based on how individuals interpreted the experiences they had gone through. Although literature suggest that students without venture also can gain valuable learning experiences from new venture creation courses (Cope, 2011; Pittaway et al. 2017; Haneberg & Aadland, forthcoming; Ilonen et al., 2018), this was not reflected throughout the data, but to a limited degree in the end of the course.

These findings imply that the production of entrepreneurial behavior is a complex bundle of motivational and emotional factors that are conceptualized as relational and social issues. Accordingly, the results support the narrativizing agency in entrepreneurial process which seems to be an attractive path of research. Narrative understanding is well suited to articulating the relational and temporal dimensions of human agency.

This paper makes a methodological contribution with a novel use of vlogs in studying agency. More specifically, as a data collection method we found that vlogs are convenient in collecting data. They decrease the role of interviewer effect (Dijkstra, 1983), for instance. Hence, our study demonstrates that the selected method relying on the usage of vlogs enables self-reflection already during the process, not only after as commonly is used. This could be employed in entrepreneurial education, but also among public policy interventions among entrepreneurial individuals. Through its methodological nuances our study contributes to the emerging field of processual and ethnographic studies of entrepreneurship (Pilegaard et al., 2010; Rasmussen et al., 2011).

Furthermore, we contribute to the critical EE studies (Tedmanson et al., 2012; Fletcher & Selden, 2015) by showing that EE's outcomes are diverse despite simplified and intentional design.

There are also limitations in using the approach. While traditional ethnography assumes stories reflecting singular and stable meaning, narrative studies treat language as a way to constitute reality. Consequently, life in narratives can't be taken for representation of facts. Furthermore, narratives are rarely used to provide causal explanations. Instead, they supply reasons for things taking place. (Bruner, 1991; Flick, 2002; Riessman, 1993) Therefore, the claim in this study is not that narrative structure is itself a causal variable that explains the outcomes in the entrepreneurial process, but rather that study participants introduce issues and effectuate outcomes in the entrepreneurial process through their talk.

Our findings have also other practical implications. By unveiling the reflections of entrepreneurial processes the narratives make processes understandable and help individuals to reflect their goals and feelings and develop more self-understanding. Making sense of these can help entrepreneurs to stay on track of their actions during their entrepreneurial process.

With regards to further research, there is a need to more analytically examine the differences between students that have differing personal learning goals. As important it would be to focus on the visual material and connect it with the narratives in order to take use of the nuances of human interaction through analyzing body language and facial expressions (Tejeda, 2008; Stroe et al., 2019).. Interesting detail which may also serve as a source for new research, is to study the possible reasons for withdrawals for participation even if an individual has agreed to volunteer in data collection. Our study suggests that in case of using vlogs as data collection method, the motivation could be gendered. Among others this would enable to study the role of emotions in the construction of agency and how emotions shape the evolution of agency during entrepreneurial processes.

Acknowledgements

This paper is part of the Academic Entrepreneurship as a Social Process (ACE) research project (project number 295958) funded by the Academy of Finland.

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Appendix 1 Analysis frame for Hannah’s vlogs

NVC process	Vlog 1: Phase 1	Vlog 2: Phase 2	Vlog 3: Phase 3	Vlog 4: Phase 4 & 5	Vlog 5: Phase 6 (7)	Vlog 6: Phase 8 & 9	Vlog 7: Phase 10
<p>What the study participant mentioned; <i>What happened also in the course.</i></p>	<p><i>Future workshop;</i> Guest speaker (Buglife); Speed dating; Identifying problems; Challenge; <i>Guest speaker</i></p>	<p>Guest speaker; Mingle; Team formation; <i>Resource map;</i> Identifying problems; <i>Researching;</i> <i>Task</i></p>	<p>Teams introduce themselves, videos; Identifying top three problems; Identifying the correct problem; Forming a testing plan</p>	<p>Team circle; Testing plan; Guest speaker; Understanding the target group; Empathy Map; Value Proposition Canvas</p>	<p>Pitching event</p>	<p>Team circle; Guest speaker; Marketing and communications; Guest speaker; Communications; Demo day</p>	<p>Final survey; Lean canvas; Describing the process and Motorola feedback; Discussion and final feedback</p>
				<p>Team circle; Establishing a business; Light entrepreneurship: Ideating a solution Quick value proposition Testing the solution</p>	<p><i>(Misses the 7: Team circle; Startup funding: Business models; Profitability)</i></p>	<p>Startup trade fair Peer feedback Pitching Lean canvas Choosing Startup course competition finalists</p>	
<p>Power and exertion of influence over actions and events</p>	<p>Is happy to participate, and sees herself to have “potential”. Credits success of the first course assignment (client encounter) to her social skills.</p>	<p>Is pleased to be allowed freedom and empowered to act upon own ideas.</p>	<p>Believes will nail testing plan, because she is (like other team members) social.</p>	<p>Feels helpless and the internal motivation is fading. Sees herself through failures. Frustration comes out in team circle; they have “nothing”, “cannot create idea out of thin air”.</p>	<p>Still trying to create ideas “out of thin air”. Stands back and chickens out from pitching. Is victim; claims that was given misinformation about the course purpose.</p>	<p>The course is now the last in her priorities. Is in panic in demo day; not much control or posture in presenting the idea. Blames course for the experienced failures.</p>	<p>Mentions receiving recognition of her role in taking action, when needed. Feels in her part being responsible that the team did not succeed better although blames misinformation.</p>
<p>Interaction and social positioning with other agents</p>	<p>Nervous, but excited to link with like-minded people. Takes lead while others “hang along”.</p>	<p>Takes lead in actions and repeats need to give space also to others. Team members have complementary skills. They are also similar, because they do not stress about the course.</p>	<p>Thinks many other teams in the course have potential and good ideas. All in their team have good ideas that are bounced around together. The mood is positive.</p>	<p>Feels discouraged when sees how much other teams have progressed. Blames the speakers and thinks they are boring. Claims her team needs more support to progress. Team has not done testing.</p>	<p>One team member enables the team to refine the business idea further. The team is not putting enough effort, though. Starts to identify with “fellow sufferers”, who are also failing the course.</p>	<p>Recognizes she had an initial contact with a member in one of the successful teams, but is now in a failing team. Does not understand how other teams have great ideas.</p>	<p>In the finale valuation team members have jovial relations to one another. Still thinks the team was not optimal, because it was not able to take action and make decisions.</p>
<p>What stands out and what meanings are given to entrepreneurship</p>	<p>Sees success stories as an inspiration. Thinks good business idea is the key to success. The team builds an initial business idea around food.</p>	<p>Jokes about the initial business idea that is starting to form around food waste and sustainable development.</p>	<p>The team name is chosen. Understands the importance of identifying the correct problem instead of barging directly into finding solutions.</p>	<p>Has “learned nothing about entrepreneurship”. Thinks that succeeding in the course is about getting more external encouragement. Team is merely “larping”, i.e. taking it as a role game.</p>	<p>The team still continues to “larp”, but she thinks that the course / business is something one can put one’s whole life into. Continue to claim that the course hasn’t given her nor others anything.</p>	<p>Claims that even in HE level students should be asked to do homework. Still agrees the best once “win” and they are not the best.</p>	<p>The course started to interest towards the end. The team was able to produce a prototype of their biodegradable product which was their biggest achievement in the course. Now recognizes that knows pitching well.</p>

Appendix 2 Analysis frame for Violet's vlogs

NVC process	Vlog 1: Phase 1	Vlog 2: Phase 2 & 3	Vlog 3: Phase 4	Vlog 4: Phase 5 & 6 & 7	Vlog 5: Phase 8 & 9 & 10
What the study participant mentioned; What also happened in the course.	<i>Future workshop; Guest speaker; Speed dating; Identifying problems; Challenge; Guest speaker</i>	<i>Guest speaker; Mingle; Team formation; Resource map; Identifying problems; Researching</i>	Team circle; Testing plan; Guest speaker; Understanding the target group; Empathy Map; Value Proposition Canvas	Team circle; Establishing a business; Light entrepreneurship; Ideating a solution; Quick value proposition; Testing the solution	Team circle; Guest speaker; Marketing and communications; Guest speaker; Communications; Demo day
		<i>Teams introduce themselves, videos; Identifying top three problems; <i>Identifying the correct problem;</i> Forming a testing plan</i>		Pitching event	Startup trade fair; Peer feedback; Pitching; Lean canvas; Choosing Startup course competition finalists
				Team circle; Startup funding: Business models; Profitability	Final survey; Lean canvas; Describing the process and Motorola feedback; Discussion and final feedback
Power and exertion of influence over actions and events	Takes a "team leader" position and coordinates activities according to her vision. Makes clear it is her idea.	Is very eager to proceed and feels the course is stalling the execution of her idea.	As the leader makes future plans and tries to anticipate next steps based on what has happened. Talks about dividing tasks for the team members.	Wishes others would commit more while trying herself to progress and learn. Feels her leadership is questioned.	Is relieved that now she can do what she wants. Has been actively selling and marketing the idea. Thinks she has "resilience" amidst it all.
Interaction and social positioning with other agents	Talks about "our gang" where most members share similar interest in games. Visions roles for everybody in the team based of their skills. Adopts "motherly" stance towards team members with social disabilities. Emphasizes open communication.	Team gets a new member, but she is not sure, if the new member has understood it's her idea. There has been some small misunderstanding in a task, where she was not kept in the loop and a team member did something wrong. Gets frustrated, but tries to stay correct and calm.	Reconsiders the division of labour. Has acquired new knowledge of social interaction deficiencies that some team members suffer from. Is readapting what is done in the course based on team members' skills. Reconfirms her position as the leader, but doubts other team members' commitment to the project. Do not find working with other teams in the course useful.	Is a bit tight about one team member not doing what she had promised to do. Meanwhile, she is "accumulating knowledge". Thinks she is more systematic and makes plans while others thinks they can do "this and that". Ponders which of the team members she could continue with after the course.	Continues to develop the business with one of the team members. A new member from outside will also join the project. Feels let down by other team members, who did not deliver what they promised. Thinks course organizes should emphasize more that in the course a business can be started; many participants hadn't realized this.
What stands out and what meanings are given to entrepreneurship	Frames the course as "project", which is "real work" and potentially leads to a "real business". Talks about getting a business ID and wishes things would progress quickly.	Is confused, if starting a business has already started in the course. Does not connect the exercises with phases in the entrepreneurial process and wishes they would "cut to the chase already".	The team has now a name and defined target group. Has reserved a web site domain for the company. Is still confused, when and how the startup will be established.	Is satisfied with the content of joint meetings that included practical information about e.g. financing. Thinks that at start, the business will not make profit and people need to understand that. Because there is no product, they will "sell the team".	A game engine has been built and the team is starting to write the script. No graphics were made, but plan is to hire a graphics designer once financing has been secured. The product is no longer "a game", but a "digital interactive learning tool" she thinks will be appealing to teachers.