

STORIES OF ENTREPRENEURS:
NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES

TURKU SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS
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PREFACE

In the introduction to this study I write how I became a researcher out of 'pure chance'. Chance or not, being a researcher is possibly the most interesting and privileged profession in the world. Independent thinking and freedom of action related to research is great. On the other hand, many times this freedom is of course illusionary because you cannot even go to the sauna without hearing the stories of the participants in your head or thinking about the relevance of an article to your research. As I discovered in this research the same illusionary freedom is a part of being an entrepreneur and I have borrowed the concept from one of the participants in this study. At one point in my research journey I found myself taking completely new paths as I was applying theories and methodologies that were new to me and to a large extent to entrepreneurship research. Here also I can find an analogy to being an entrepreneur: if entrepreneurs have taken this leap of faith by abandoning the safe and the familiar in the face of the new and alluring, why would not an entrepreneurship researcher. Presumably as a starting point, a thesis on entrepreneurship should strive to be innovative and entrepreneurial.

The journey has been fun and educational but not lonely. I have received a lot of support from various places and people. Firstly, I'd like to thank all the entrepreneurs participating in this study. All accepted without much persuasion and those moments were the most rewarding ones in this process. My sincerest thanks to the examiners of this study, Professor Päivi Eriksson and Professor Robert Blackburn, for their excellent comments that helped me to improve the research. I am very thankful that Professor Anne Kovalainen agreed to be my supervisor. As an experienced and well read academic she has had plenty of ideas to help me lay the foundations for this research. Anne's inspiring approach and her willingness to please me by setting deadlines for each phase has kept this process going. Without Anne's support this research would not yet be here and in this form, so thank you Anne for your significant input!

The reason why being a researcher has gradually become an interesting career alternative is partly due to the magnificent working environment at the Small Business Institute. All these years Dr. Jarna Heinonen has been my encouraging and inspiring boss, a role model and an important influence in this study. The director of the Business Research and Development Centre, Professor Antti Paasio has encouraged us all in entrepreneurial and innovative action and thinking. Thank you Jarna and

Antti! Furthermore, I'd like to thank the team in the Small Business Institute for the hilarious and buzzing years at the Institute. Thanks to Dr. Pasi Malinen for your comments and the corrections you made to the references in this study! I am happy to have been able to work with you.

My warmest thanks also to the Department of Management, Professor Satu Lähteenmäki and fellow doctoral students for numerous inspiring research seminars. During these years I have also participated in many other workshops, conferences and courses in Barcelona, Venice, Jyväskylä and other interesting places. They have given me a lot of inspiration and spurs of enthusiasm that were necessary for conducting this piece of research. I want to thank all the teachers and other doctoral students at those occasions for helping me to find my path as a researcher. Furthermore, I would like to thank Karen Winnery for editing the language of my thesis.

Important support both financially and morally has been given by the Academy of Finland, the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Foundation for Economic Education, The Paulo Foundation, the Foundation for Commerce Education in Turku and the Education and Training Fund of the 1954 Business Graduates Meeting in Turku. They believed that my subject was worth studying and created the financial basis for conducting this research.

Reading is an essential part of research and I developed an interest in reading at home. From home I also gained the strong belief that I could do whatever I wanted to do in life. Thanks to my parents Seija and Hannu! In addition, I remember with warmth my late grandparents', Ville and Reetta Hytti, 'scholarship fund' during my school years. They created a sense of belief that being successful in studies is a worthwhile activity. I would also like to thank my niece Essi (and indirectly her parents): you're the world's best niece! During the research process I also ran into an entrepreneur in my personal life. Thank you Timo for your interest towards my academic project and for increasing my understanding of entrepreneurship but more importantly for everything else!

Turku, 21st of February 2003, on a sunny early Spring day.

Ulla Hytti

ESIPUHE

Tämän tutkimuksen johdannossa kerron kuinka 'sattumalta' ajaudun tutkijaksi. Sattumaa tai ei niin tutkijan ammatti on ainakin hauska ammatti ja olen usein kokenut olevani erittäin etuoikeutettu henkilö. Tutkijuuteen liittyvä itsenäisen ajattelun ja toiminnan vapaus on hienoa. Toisaalta monesti se vapaus on tietenkin 'illusorista', koska mitä vapautta se on, että ei voi edes saunaan mennä ilman, että päässä vilisee haastateltavien puhe tai luetun artikkelin merkitys omalle työlle. Tästä löytyy analogia yrittäjän vapauteen, ja olenkin tämän 'illusorinen vapaus' -käsitteen lainannut suoraan erään tähän tutkimukseen osallistuneen yrittäjän puheesta. Tutkimusprosessini jossakin vaiheessa löysin itseni kulkemassa täysin uusia polkuja eli soveltamassa itselleni ja suurelta osin yrittäjyystutkimuksellekin uutta teoreettista näkökulmaa ja metodologista otetta. Myös tästä löydän analogian tutkimuskohteisiini: jos yrittäjät ovat ottaneet 'loikan tuntemattomaan', hylänneet tutun ja turvallisen uuden ja houkuttelevan edessä niin sen voi tehdä yrittäjyystutkijakin. Kaiketi lähtökohtaisesti väitöskirjan yrittäjyydestä pitäisi olla jollakin tavalla innovatiivinen ja yrittäjämäinen.

Matka on ollut hauska, opettava, muttei yksinäinen. Olen saanut tukea suunnalta jos toiselta. Ensinnäkin kiitän kaikkia tutkimukseen osallistuneita yrittäjiä. Kaikki suostuivat haastatteluun ilman suurempaa suostuteltua ja haastatteluhetket olivat tutkimukseni antoisimpia tilaisuuksia. Lämpimät kiitokseni työni esitarkastajille professori Päivi Erikssonille ja professori Robert Blackburnille ansiokkaista kommentteista, jotka auttoivat minua viimeistelemään työni. Paljon saan kiittää siitä, että professori Anne Kovalainen suostui tämän tutkimuksen ohjaajaksi. Hänen osaamisestaan ja lukeneisuudestaan on riittänyt tiiliä tämän tutkimuksen peruskiven muuraamiseksi. Annen kannustava ote ja sopeutuminen itselleni tärkeiden aikataulujen tekemiseen on pitänyt prosessin liikkeessä. Ilman Annen tukea tämä tutkimus ei olisi vielä tässä eikä tämänkaltainen, joten kiitokset merkittävästä panoksestasi Anne!

Se, että en millään ole halunnut lähteä PK-Instituutista pois on varmasti vaikuttanut ajautumiseeni (sosiaalistumiseeni?) tutkijaksi. Kaikki nämä vuodet dosentti Jarna Heinonen on ollut erittäin innostava ja kannustava pomoni, tutkijaroolimallini ja tutkimukseni taustavaikuttaja! Lisäksi laitoksen johtaja professori Antti Paasio on kannustanut meitä kaikkia yrittäjämäiseen ja innovatiiviseen toimintaan. Suurkiitokset teille Jarna ja Antti! Lisäksi haluan kiittää kaikkia PK-Instituuttilaisia näistä ratki-

riemukkaista ja työntäyteisistä vuosista. Dosentti Pasi Maliselle kiitokset tutkimukseeni antamistasi kommentteista ja lähdeluettelovirheiden korjauksista! Olen iloinen, että olen saanut tehdä töitä kanssanne!

Lämpimät kiitokset myös Johtamisen laitokselle ja professori Satu Lähteenmäelle sekä muille laitoksen jatko-opiskelijoille inspiroivista tutkimusseminaareista. Vuosien kuluessa olen osallistunut myös muihin työseminaareihin, tieteellisiin konferensseihin ja tutkimuskursseihin Barcelonassa, Venetsiassa, Jyväskylässä ja muissa mielenkiintoisissa paikoissa. Ne ovat antaneet paljon uusia virikkeitä ja uutta intoa tutkimuksen tekemiseen. Tahdon kiittää kaikkien näiden kurssien ohjaajia ja muita tohtoriopiskelijoita avustanne tutkijan polkuni löytymisessä! Lisäksi kiitokset Karen Winnerylle raportin kieliasun editoimisesta!

Tärkeän tukensa paitsi rahallisesti mutta myös kannustavassa mielessä ovat tälle tutkimukselle antaneet Suomen Akatemia, Suomen Kulttuurirahasto, Paulon Säätiö, Liikesivistysrahasto, Turun kaoppaopetussäätiö ja Turun Ekonomipäivien 1954 opinto- ja koulutusrahasto. Nämä tahot ovat uskoneet, että aiheeni on tutkimisen arvoinen ja luoneet taloudellisen pohjan tutkimuksen tekemiselle!

Lukeminen on olennainen osa tutkimista ja siihen minut opetettiin jo kotona. Kotoa olen saanut lujan uskon myös siihen, että minä pystyn mihiin vain mitä ikinä haluan tehdä. Kiitos tästä vanhemmilleni Seijalle ja Hannulle! Lisäksi muistan lämmöllä edesmenneiden isovanhempieni Ville ja Reetta Hytin kouluaikejen 'stipendirahastoa'. He valoivat uskoa siihen, että opinnoissa menestyminen on hienoa ja kannattavaa. Lisäksi haluan kiittää veljentytärtäni Essiä (ja välillisesti hänen vanhempiaan): Olet maailman paras veljentytär! Tutkimusprosessini kuluessa törmäsin yrittäjään myös henkilökohtaisessa elämässäni. Kiitos Timo mielenkiinnostasi akateemista projektiani kohtaan ja yrittäjyyteen liittyvän ymmärrykseni lisäämisestä, mutta ennen kaikkea siitä kaikesta muusta!

Turussa aurinkoisena kevättalven päivänä 21.2.2003

Ulla Hytti

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1. ENTREPRENEURSHIP, NARRATIVES AND IDENTITIES

1.1 My story of becoming a researcher engaging in this study

When finalising my Master's degree and the thesis that went with it I felt sick and tired of research. I had struggled with my thesis for about two years and finally I just wrote it up to get it done with before going to study in France for a year. When graduating from the university I really did not have an idea of what I wanted to do with my life professionally. I had no passion for direct marketing or personnel management, for accounting or anything else for that matter. I felt more like the Jane-of-all-trades whom I believed could develop an interest and be reasonably good at most things. For this reason it was difficult for me to try to convince potential employers that I was 'their girl' and I kept going from one interview to another. To my friends and relatives I responded that I was willing to try anything but research. Later when things turned out as they did I realised I had forgotten about the old James Bond wisdom 'Never say never'.

At that point in my life my future boss from the Small Business Institute called me and asked me if I wanted to come and work with the Institute for a month as a research assistant conducting some telephone interviews for a project. I had sent my CV to the centre applying for a non-research related post, and she spotted me from the pile because of my experience of working in telesales and surveys. I accepted with the idea that 'a month wouldn't kill me', and it was better to do something than nothing. At the end of the month I realised I had enjoyed the time at the Institute; working with intelligent, dynamic, youthful and nice people. It was pleasant to work in an inspiring environment where my ability as a fast learner and efficiency in completing the tasks I was assigned to was appreciated and I was asked to stay within the Institute. I was glad that my skills had been spotted but I was highly sceptical, or even refused to think about doctoral studies. I have been working in the Small Business Institute since 1996, and nearly all my contacts with entrepreneurs are a result of this working relationship. My role in the institute has always involved holding interviews with entrepreneurs for various projects and under various subjects. I enjoyed meeting and talking to entrepreneurs and listening to their stories.

In 1998 I had my second never say never experience as I suddenly decided to continue my studies and enrolled in our school as a doctoral student. I had realised that it does not pay off to be working at a university without a PhD and I was not willing to quit my job or leave my colleagues. So I made my first attempt at a research proposal. In that proposal I proposed to study the effects of entrepreneurship education – so in a way I was already interested in how entrepreneurs are being ‘made’. Later, I started thinking about whether I could study entrepreneurs more holistically in their development processes and my supervisor suggested the idea of identity to me. Nevertheless, I was still interested in actually investigating the process of a person becoming an entrepreneur and I planned to conduct a longitudinal study of entrepreneurs participating in an entrepreneurship education programme, and to investigate their identity development as they shift from being non-entrepreneurs to being entrepreneurs. As a result I went to meet some people who had decided to take part in a programme at the Small Business Institute to gather pre-understanding of my subjects, the future entrepreneurs. During that process I learned that becoming an entrepreneur may or may not take place during a one-year course, and for some the overall process can take many years. Therefore I realised that it might be impossible for me to find people that would definitely become entrepreneurs or for whom it might happen during a reasonable timeframe. In addition I became critical of my own naïve assumption that I would be able to study identities through constant observation.

...“nothing ever happens right where and when the researcher is observing. All important events happen at some other time, other place. Although in the beginning researchers tend to be taken by panic and try to chase “the action,” in time they learn that important events are made into such in accounts. Nobody is aware that an important event is happening when it takes place,” (Czarniawska 1998, 29)

About the same time a fellow doctoral student confronted me in a doctoral tutorial by asking to explain what really interests me in my research, what is the driving force of my study. My meetings and interviews with entrepreneurs had assured me that entrepreneurs are special kind of people. They are often very charismatic and meeting them is a very powerful experience even to the extent that sometimes it is difficult to fit in the same room with them. During my dissertation process I became interested in how this happens – are they as sometimes told mythical persons that are born with exceptional charisma and characteristics, or is it some-

thing that develops during the course of their life as entrepreneurs through the experiences they face. My own experiences of my career choice and development coloured my thinking and my readings of the articles that aimed at conveying ideas such as ‘people become entrepreneurs if the value added exceeds that of wage work’ or ‘people become entrepreneurs if they factually possess certain inner characteristics’ became highly critical. The results of these studies have not been encouraging and I felt that the existing research was really missing something. The epistemological and ontological assumptions made in those studies seemed to suggest to me that they had taken the wrong path. Interestingly, the entrepreneurs in my study also contested the existence of ‘mythical entrepreneurs’ or related ‘attributes’. One of the interviewees posed me a question before the interview: ‘*Are you interested in entrepreneurs as these mythical people that are often discussed?*’ My answer was that my aim was to the contrary.

Personally, I feel I am growing into research – I am gradually becoming a researcher by acting as one and it is inspired by my learning who I can be and how I can be a researcher. I do not seem to be fitting into the stereotypical researcher ideal or image: I am not a thinker, I am a doer. Could this be the process that entrepreneurs go through themselves? That they become who they are – competent, skilled entrepreneurs by acting as such? It is through understanding my own life and career that I look at the lives and careers of entrepreneurs. One of the entrepreneurs I interviewed said after the interview that ‘*I think being a researcher is very similar with being an entrepreneur*’. I felt exhilarated because those were my thoughts exactly. The elements of risk and uncertainty are present in both projects, the process of creating a service/product or a study has a lot in common and the need for joy of independence is integral to both. These analogies create common ground. I can and may draw on my own experiences as a starting point to understand the entrepreneurs. Still, those experiences I draw on are mine, not the entrepreneurs’. I cannot put myself in the shoes of an entrepreneur, nor in the shoes of another researcher for that matter, I observe and experience the world from my own shoes.

My research project started to develop its form – I wanted to learn how entrepreneurial identities were being developed by looking at entrepreneur's own constructions – self-narratives – of how they became entrepreneurs. I reasoned that I would see that their lives as entrepreneurs and their stories of being entrepreneurs are interrelated.

In order to realise the aims of this study, I decided to interview eight entrepreneurs from various fields and with different backgrounds. Al-

though the stories may share some similarities they are all different at the outset, illustrating and pointing towards the different routes to entrepreneurship that there are currently available, e.g. becoming an entrepreneur at a young age or at a more mature age, from employment / unemployment / university, etc. I will give detailed information on the entrepreneurs later in this report (Chapters 5 and 6) but here I will present them briefly in order to allow the readers to get acquainted with the characters in this story as they appear in the Chapters 2, 3 and 4. The characters in this story are:

- Rosemary, an engineer with long experience in the textile industry. After the relocation of her former employer nearly 20 years ago she decided to set up a textile firm. Currently Rosemary devotes some of her time to informing and educating young entrepreneurs through mentoring and networking.
- Jonathan, a former philosophy student who engaged in different projects during his university years to raise money collegially for student friends and to engage in meaningful work. Then, a translation assignment is received that serves as the breakthrough for his future entrepreneurial career and after a few years in the business Jonathan finally quits his teaching job.
- Eliza, a designer who has experience of freelance work and entrepreneurship as well as a working as an employed designer. Currently Eliza is working as a sole entrepreneur in a successful business but ensures she has time for leisure as well.
- Marge, a journalist who has had temporary jobs in unrewarding work environments followed by periods of unemployment and further education courses. To resolve her growing dissatisfaction with her employment situation Marge sets up her own company and starts selling her services to different magazines and newspapers.
- Diane, a marketing professional who has had different posts in different organisations. After the bankruptcy of her former employer she decides to go into a business on her own providing training services especially for female entrepreneurs. Currently Diane is facing some difficulties in managing the business due to an illness in the family.
- Timothy, a business student who graduated from the university during the recession and in the absence of other alternatives he formed a multimedia company with three other student friends. Today Timothy is motivated by the opportunity of finding solutions for his customers' problems and needs.

- Arthur, a metal shop worker who gradually over the years educated himself to become a university engineer and worked as a CEO in an engineering company. Not sharing the same values as the owner of the company Arthur decides to leave the company and is followed by some other employees to set up a new firm. After some successful years the firm goes bankrupt in the midst of the recession but the activities continue. Currently the business is running smoothly.
- Samuel, a scientist who after finishing his PhD decided to start up a biotechnology company with two former colleagues. The company underwent massive growth. Samuel is searching for his place in the growing company and finds the personnel management side of the business to be the most challenging one.

1.2 Aims and research questions of the study

In the previous chapter I write a story of how I became interested in my research area and I drew loose links between the key concepts – entrepreneurship, identity and narratives – in my study. My research question is *how does an individual construct being an entrepreneur*. It must be noted, however, that I do not believe that the entrepreneurial identity covers the whole identity of the individual but there is room for other identities as well. In this study, I will discuss the key concepts and the links between these concepts. All of these concepts are also their own research areas, but curiously enough none of them can be seen to represent a very developed area with strict and well-grounded definitions and established traditions. All of them are elusive as concepts (it is hard to pinpoint what is exactly meant by entrepreneurship, identity or narrative), and entrepreneurship, identity and narrative research can all have various forms – they can be portrayed as umbrellas for a wide variety of research traditions, methods and areas. The research approach and the main themes are visualised in Figure 1.

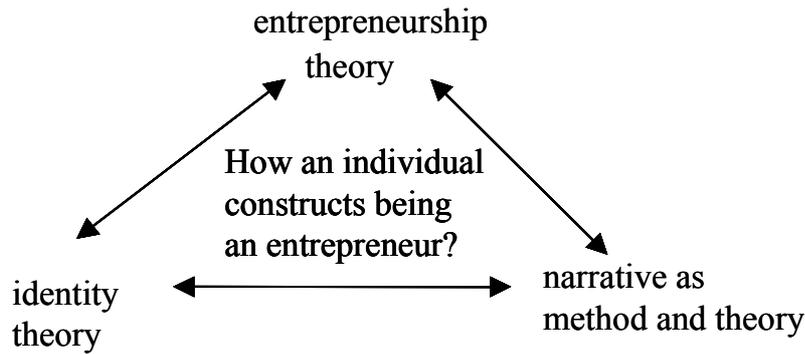


Figure 1 The research approach and the main themes of the study

It is these themes that will be at the centre of the theoretical and methodological discussion of the report. In the theoretical part I will discuss what the concept of identity is that I will use in this study. I will also investigate some of the reasons behind the popularity of identity research at the moment (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, I will investigate how entrepreneurship has been studied and how my approach relates to the previous studies with specific emphasis on the points of debate. The identity approach that purports that we are constantly changing and renegotiating our identity in our interaction with the social context reflects my view of entrepreneurs: entrepreneurs negotiate their entrepreneurial identities, and aim to present themselves as good entrepreneurs whose lives are meaningful and make sense. Thus my methodological choices need to reflect these assumptions and I discuss the narrative method chosen and its relevance for my study of studying entrepreneurial identities in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5, I will briefly present the participants in this study as well as provide a short introduction to the themes discussed. Thus, the aim of the Chapter is to give an overview of the building blocks of the stories. It is then in Chapter 6 where the stories of entrepreneurs are presented individually, which provides connections to the themes and between the stories. Finally, in Chapter 7, I will discuss the research results and the contribution of this study.

2. IDENTITY

2.1 Making identities matter (borrowed from Williams)

As embodied people, we are unquestionably whole entities – we have been born at a given time and place and ever since, we have lived our lives by inhabiting the same body. However, our bodies do not remain the same throughout our lives although we do not replace them. Our bodies grow and shrink and our faces change over time even if some characteristics remain recognisable throughout our lives. “*I know that I am myself because my substance is this particular body that has continued through time*” (Polkinghorne 1988, 147). However, we believe that there is more to us than just bodies – we have minds, souls, feelings and thoughts and we have an identity. In this chapter I will discuss what constitutes an identity, and how we may study identities.

What is the need to problematise the existence of identity in the first place; why should we bother about identities, why are they brought into focus? Is identity development a naturally occurring phenomenon, or is it a socially constructed one? Why have identities emerged as a research question within the social sciences, or why in our everyday lives do we seem to be challenged to answer the questions of who we are all the time? It is often asserted that traditional societies did not face the question because they did not make the question of individual identity a matter of reflection or an issue of serious doubt. In the pre-modern times the choice and negotiation were not part of the identity development process and hence, they were unproblematic. Stuart Hall (1999) sees that the source for the pre-modern identities was tradition, and this tradition was not challenged. As an example, a maid in the pre-modern times did not strive to climb the social ladder so there was no place for the transformation or negotiation of her identity and no room for an identity crisis. So, one can argue that the stable arrangements of identities became a subject of concern with modernisation. The massive political, social and economical changes taking place did have an effect on identities. For example, contemporary working life requires individuals to engage in portfolio careers as opposed to the old ideal of having one upward career in one organisation, thus, contesting the stability of the professional identity. *This said I share an understanding of identity development as taking place in the social context.* (Williams 2000, 35-36.) Following the ideas presented by Berger, Berger and Kellner in 1974 Williams (2000, 38) ar-

gues that the identities of individuals in modern society are in a state of permanent crisis. Modern society is a segmented one based on professional specialisation and social differentiation. This creates the obligation that our identities are subject to constant pressure for change and multiplication, and they are made subject to negotiation. It could be argued, however, that the strong career identities and identities that we have derived from our professions have come to matter more and more, and they provide a lot of social support. For example, I assume that every researcher has been questioned on the nature of their field of expertise under the assumption that as a researcher one has an improved access to knowledge and can therefore be expected to provide true information of any matter.

“In other words, identity is not categorized a noun but a way of being-in-relation-to-others as we contest and negotiate who we are in responsive ways.” (Cunliffe 2001, 361)

2.1.1 Being the same and different: constructing an identity

Many writers have refused to define the concept of identity due to its elusive nature and it has often been substituted with the notions of self and subjectivity. Williams (2000, 3) acknowledges this difficulty but sees that it is worth the effort to try to do it. The simple idea of identity is indeed the “sameness” – that over time an individual’s actions can be seen to be that of one singular person. We can say that we know who we are, and hence, we claim knowledge of our own identity. Similarly, we may claim the knowledge of the identity of others by saying that we know who they are but what constitutes this knowledge? How can it be made a subject to study within the human sciences?

Chandler (2000, 209-231) discusses what he calls the paradox of being the same and changing over time. He emphasises the meaning of being the same – “*whenever and wherever selves are to be considered, they must, in some arguable way, also be understood to remain the same*” (Chandler 2000, 211). In his commentary to Chandler’s article Sarbin claims that the paradox can actually be solved by making a distinction between personal (or what Sarbin calls human) identity and social identity. The former addresses the question ‘what am I?’ whereas the latter addresses the question ‘Who am I?’ The epistemological perspective is not either/or but both/and. (Sarbin 2000, 253-254.) So, we remain both the same and at the same time we change. The same distinction is also made by Williams (2000) who provides a thorough discussion, firstly, of the history of identity research and, secondly, of the emergence of and

understanding of identities. He sees that identity research revolves around two types of questions 1) who is he as a person, and provides examples of what he calls ‘the metaphysical discussion’ beginning with Descartes and ending in Hegel and Nietzsche, and 2) ‘who am I?’ which is answered by the sociological discussion. The latter is made explicit, for example, in the following definition: Identity is “*a typified self at a stage in the life course situated in a context of organised social relationships*” (Weigert – Teitge - Teitge 1986, 53 quoting Stone – Faberman 1970).

2.1.2 Core, integral identity

My analogy of the body to that of identity can also be investigated historically. The body was not of interest to Descartes as the Cartesian self relies on the premise that the self is equipped with reason, consciousness and capacity to take action. “*Eco cogito, ergo sum*” (“I think, therefore I am”). The Cartesian self is founded and centred on the practices and products of thought which is separate from and superior to the body. The centre of the Cartesian self is composed of a core that originates at the birth of a human being, and begins to grow and develop in its unique way. The essence of the core, however, remains stable. This idea is an essentialist one; a person is believed to have a substantial existence. The Cartesian self is a disembodied and asocial identity – every person inhabits his or her own area and cannot be affected by other participant subjects. (Hall S. 1999, 31, Williams 2000, 13-17.) In this line of thinking a person is also capable of knowing the true self that constitutes their identity (Polkinghorne 1988, 148).

Although the idea of the Cartesian self has received a lot of criticism it still lives as the counterpart or the mirror of contemporary discussion. Weigert et al (1986) make the distinction between self and identity by stating that an individual has one self that becomes situationally typified through a variety of identities. The personal identity in the Goffmanian view refers to the unique – the self that can be considered as the source for identities, the ‘private area’. Like Goffman many other writers refer to the existence of a core – although they do not claim that it is stable or even in some cases researchable but implicitly its existence is assumed. For example, Harré’s ideas of two identity projects – personal and social identity project – and the role of narratives in mediating between the two share the same implicit idea of the existence of a core. Furthermore, it seems that it is typical for us human beings to account for our experience of ourselves in an individualistic way: as if we all existed from birth as separate, isolated individuals already containing ‘minds’ or ‘mentalities’

wholly within ourselves, set against a material world itself devoid of any mental processes. We talk this way about ourselves because we are trapped within what can be thought of as a 'text', culturally developed textual resources – the text of 'possessive' individualism. (Shotter 1989.)

Locke's contribution to the discussion of identities in my reading is the idea of memory. He saw that identity is constituted and sustained by a set of recalled experiences unique to the person, and the person remains the same as long as this recollection is retained. (Hall S. 1999, 32, Williams 2000, 18.) This is an interesting aspect. In the cases of persons suffering from Alzheimer's disease or other illnesses of that kind whereby the person's ability to remember is reduced, relatives are often quoted of saying the ill person is no longer the same – they have indeed changed because they no longer remember who they are and their recollection is being challenged. As my study focuses strongly on the recollection and the narratives around and about that recollection I must acknowledge that memory plays a part in the construction of identities. For the sake of clarity I will emphasise that I do not aim for the true memory or an authentic recollection of experiences but the ability of remembering in general. In this sense the ideas of Hume (in Williams 2000, 20) are closer to my study than that of Locke – memory contributes to the construction of identity and is not a mechanism by which identity is discovered.

2.1.3 Identities as constructions and deconstructions

In the realm of discussing the 'representational crisis' and the (in)capability of researchers to capture the lived experience one is also tempted to ask who is the subject, and does the subject have direct access to his or her lived experiences. In traditional ethnographies and many other qualitative studies, the literal translation of talk is seen to equal lived experience and its representation. This idea has been challenged by claiming that language and speech do not mirror experience. The text, the representation of the talk, is crafted by the writer, not the participant. The experience, the talk about the experience and the text created are being separated. (Denzin 1997, 3-5.) Identity development is a constant self-organising cycle between self-experience (I) and the explanations and interpretations developing on the basis of I-constructions (Me). Identity always develops in a psychosocial context in the meaning-making processes with regard to other people and culture. There are no fixed, externally or internally given meanings, but they are being constructed in a dialogue between ideas and the world. (Niemi 2001, 18-19, Bruner 1986, 158.) In this view, identities are not created internally in the entrepre-

neur's mind, nor externally by the society and its structure but constructed dialogically between entrepreneurs and others in everyday conversations and life (Cunliffe 2001, 354).

In opposition to earlier writers the idea of the intersubjective nature was introduced by Hegel and Nietzsche. In Hegel's ideas full consciousness of self is impossible without the responses of others. He also provided an understanding of identity being more of an action than a product of thought. (Williams 2000, 21-30.) This is the sociological subject; the subject is constructed in relation to meaningful others. This idea underlines the view that identity is being built in relation to others, it is shaped in a dialogue with others. (Hall S. 1999, 22.)

The concept of self deals no longer with the discovery of the core, innate self but it is the construction built on other people's reactions and attitudes towards a person and is subject to change as the responses of others change their characters (Polkinghorne 1988, 150). Identity is not something pre-given and fixed, but constructed and maintained in social relationships. This social constructionist approach rejects the idea that an individual is a unique, stable and whole entity, and adopts the idea that an individual should be seen as a socio-historical and socio-cultural product. (Weigert et al 1986.) Many others have also discussed the idea that identities are, in fact, constructed – and challenged the Cartesian point-of-view that selves exist inside ourselves as something unique and distinctive that guarantee our personal identities. Another question is whether we are free to construct our identities or whether our identities are being constructed in relation to others (Shotter 1989). In this study, I will rely on the notion of identity is constructed in relation to others. In the analysis, for example, I will investigate how the participants construct their identities in relation to my own presence.

The post-modern subject presents a radical view on the social and relational character of identity where the subject is no longer a subject in itself but rather a place in the language. Subject is not an essentialist, but a polyphonique one. The structuralists following de Saussure understand language as a social not individual phenomenon and, therefore, language precedes us. We cannot in any way be the constructs of language but rather language constructs us. An individual cannot attach the meanings to their identities, so an individual cannot control what his words really mean. Words do not mean anything, but the meaning comes from intertextuality, the relationships between words. In this line of thinking agency follows structure (adopted from Barthes 1993 in Heikkinen 2001, 114-115). The most influential writer representing this idea is Michel Foucault. If his text were to be read radically he seems to exaggerate the

coherence and power of the disciplinary forces and practices that create and sustain identity and subjectivity. A more liberal interpretation allows room for local and varied practices and the existence of natural and social phenomena that these practices are forced to accommodate. (Williams 2000, 64.) The postmodernists following Lyotard and Derrida understand identities as deconstruction and abandon the ideas of unity, totality and sameness. The postmodernists therefore attack the unified self and its identity. There is an absence of 'being' behind 'doing' (from Nietzsche). Past and integration of the new with the old is not relevant. In its extreme identity becomes merely a play or an image of identity as performance and in a way a person may construct his own identity. The meaning of identity is reduced to a point where action happens to take place. (Hall S. 1999, 40-44, Williams 2000, 58-73.) The post-modern seems to present a negation of identity but at the same time it fails to substitute it with another concept (Hall S. 1999, 246).

I refute the idea of postmodernism or post-structuralism that it is possible to choose an identity and to freely create an identity. This I derive from my understanding that identities are constructed through interaction with others. In this sense, identity is formulated in the Hegelian sense against 'the other' whether that be our own historical past or in the present character of contemporary social formation. An individual cannot relate him- or herself to others just as he or she pleases because individuals are not related to others from their own perspectives, but the relationships are shared. Thus, Shotter (1989) argues that an individual is performing in the situation with the knowledge and expectation that others will surely intervene in some way if he or she does something 'wrong'. This idea presented by Shotter (1989) seems to be quite extreme as it assumes an identity that constantly scans and reflects the actions of others. In addition, it is not a given that others will intervene. Nevertheless, it is an important notion in the sense that it shares an understanding that how others might respond to us is a part of who they are to us and clearly we compose ourselves differently for different audiences. In those interactions and relationships individuals inform others how to be, which means that human beings are produced by other such beings (Shotter 1989, 143-149.) Richard Jenkins (2000) discusses in his article the mechanisms between (group) identification (internal process of 'us') and categorisation (external process by 'them'), and he claims that external categorisations are significant in processes of internal identification, and the external categorisations either wholly or partly are in fact internalised into self definitions (Jenkins 2000, 21).

In addition, our ways of talking are not neutral, but they perform different forms of social relationships, different statuses, different ways of 'positioning' ourselves in relation to others, different patterns of rights and privileges, duties and obligations. Although entrepreneurs in this study talk in many ways of their entrepreneurship I still claim that they cannot talk in just any way, for example, all of them describe their activities to be meaningful and important both for them and implicitly for society (see also Johansson 1997). We often express ourselves in ways approved of by others. We feel that our reality must be of a certain kind. We talk as if our experience of our reality is constituted for us largely by the already established ways in which we talk in our attempts to account for ourselves. (Shotter 1989, 143-149.) These ideas are helpful in analysing the interviews in my study. In all of the interviews I ask the entrepreneurs what is the best thing about being an entrepreneur, and nearly all start with the laconic but powerful statement: 'Freedom!' I do not want to challenge this and maybe the understanding of the individuals interpretation of 'freedom' will provide a new understanding of the kind of freedom the entrepreneurs attach to the idea, but it also seems to be 'the thing' to talk about. In a way this could also be interpreted from the point of view of the importance of opposition or differentiation in the formation and maintenance of social identity, of being a member in the group of entrepreneurs (Carr 1986, 158).

2.1.4 Identities: One and many

In her methodological paper Blumenthal (1999, 380-381) asks why researchers assume that there is one identity when she herself intuitively can at one point of time identify the many identities that she has as an academic and as a mother. On the one hand we acknowledge the existence of multiple identities; that individuals are faced with the task of continually managing multiple identities within and across situations (Weigert et al 1986) and in situations where the multiple identities may conflict (Pratt - Foreman 2000). On the other hand, it seems that our approaches and research designs are not well suited to accommodate this idea. However, there are exceptions. May (2001, 67) studies how lone motherhood is constructed in written life-stories of Swedish speaking women in Finland. This is in contrast to many other studies on lone motherhood that create a social category out of lone motherhood and lone motherhood becomes the lens through which all other aspects of women's lives are investigated. May takes another point-of-view: she looks at the lives of women who happen to be lone mothers (they claim

that position in their stories they write to researchers), and looks at the lone motherhood as embedded in the whole.

...“solely focusing on lone motherhood in a woman’s life risks reducing her to a social phenomenon, forgetting that she is a person, an individual with more aspects to her identity and life than just lone motherhood.” (May 2001, 67)

This is a very interesting idea and its implications for my study are worth exploring. In my study, I take the entrepreneurship as a lens, i.e. I ask my interviewees to narrate their entrepreneurial lives. I am however, interested in exploring how the entrepreneurial identity relates to the whole – to other aspects of their identities and lives (being mothers and fathers, daughters, professionals). A similar approach has been taken by Lindgren (2000) in her study of female teachers who became entrepreneurs by starting their own private schools. So although my focus is that of an entrepreneurial identity, my research calls for adopting a more holistic perspective by ‘zooming out’ of that particular category to understanding the personal lives of the entrepreneurs as a whole.

For my study, the most interesting part in the discussion of identity deals with identity as a social position. Social identity reflects the fact that individuals regularly identify themselves, and are identified by others, with reference to a set of standardized categories or positions. Social identity refers to group memberships (e.g. gender, occupation). However, gender and occupation construct our identities to different degrees – our gender is normally always visible to others and we carry it with us from one encounter to another, but our occupation may be hidden in some encounters. Williams (2000) argues that the idea of choosing our identities and the existence of pre-determined identifiable categories are not contradictory but in fact

...“the fragmented nature of contemporary social experience reflects and facilitates the increased importance of differentiated identities that contain attributes, experiences and projects that category members share in common. [] Searching for and achieving an identity according to this image is simply to search for the category to which one really belongs and finding from its characteristics who one really is. In contemporary societies, the list of categorical and positional identities is well-known and is accorded practical significance through attentiveness of individuals to the identity matters”. (Williams, 2000, 49)

I think Hermans (2001a, 2001 b) takes the idea of coexistence of one and many even further. Hermans theoretically combines two very different theories of self into one – what he calls the dialogical self. The Jamesian self of continuity, sense of sameness through time, distinctiveness from others and a sense of personal volition (continuous appropriation and rejection of thoughts) is reflected and the Bakhtian views on self; the polyphonic self where it is possible to differentiate between the inner world of one and the same individual in the form of inter-personal relationships. However, James also acknowledges the existence of multiple selves but through social roles/selves. Hermans combines these two in the dialogical self that is conceptualised as “*a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions. In this conception, the I has the possibility to move from one spatial position to another in accordance with changes in situation and time*” (Hermans 2001a, 248). In his views, the unity of the self as closely related to continuity does not contradict the existence of multiplicity, which is closely related to discontinuity. Another feature of the dialogical self is the coexistence of time and space. It is this spatial nature that calls for the use of the dynamic terms of ‘position’ and ‘positioning’ as opposed to the traditional term of ‘role’. The dialogical self assumes that there are several I-positions that we can occupy. The I-positions can also agree, disagree, contradict, understand, misunderstand, question and challenge the I in another position. The existence of multiple identities has been accepted elsewhere but this is followed by the idea that those identities must be managed. The Hermanian idea that we can occupy different I-positions, and in that sense those different I-positions need not to be managed since the dialogical self is tied to a particular position in space and time. (Hermans 2001a, 243-250)

Analysing contradictions or ambivalence in the identity talk could be the solution to understanding multiple identities (Blumenthal 1999, 386). The answers of the narrator may be different depending from what point of view the person is narrating from – from example whether as a mother or a professional. Given the changes that have taken place in the current employment culture whereby individuals are seen more as resources that can fulfil a particular need and than can be dismissed if not needed anymore, the category of ‘freelancer’ or ‘entrepreneur’ may turn out to be the important stabilising effect on an individual’s life and the social category that the individual him- or herself has control over. This idea is derived from one of the interviewees in my study: the narrator Marge felt important when she set up her own company and she could relate herself to that social position in the long term, and this category could not be denied her by anybody else. So social categorisation provided a sense of stability

and rootedness, a sense of significant differences, a sense of history and continuity and a sense of the destiny and mission (Smith cited in Williams 2000, 50) although the idea of becoming an entrepreneur due to the increased security is contrary to current thinking, and may also be seen to be contradictory in the narrator's account.

However, the problems attached to temporary work and to the construction of a stable social identity have been identified previously. These individuals do not have the same opportunities as others to gain support from stable groups in the workplace since their work is more focused on goals and tasks, short-term personal interaction, effectiveness, rationality and immediate responsibility. (Lindgren – Wåhlin 2001, 358.)

In my study, I ask the interviewees to adopt a particular identity position, as I am interested in their identities as entrepreneurs so my request could be considered as an invitation, acceptance or re-enforcement of their identities as entrepreneurs. This means that the participants do not speak from just any position, but on this particular site they talk as 'entrepreneurs' (see also Meriläinen 2000, 419). None of them refused this position and, thus, they accepted the identity (label?) that I suggested for them and narrated their identities from this position (see also Warren – Fassett 2002). In Cohen and Musson's (2000) study this was not the case. They studied the construction of professional identity of 24 women who had moved from employment to self-employment and their understanding and identification of the term 'entrepreneur' and in fact, the majority of these women did not identify themselves with the term. The respondents fell into two large groupings – firstly to those who considered the term positively, but felt excluded from it, and secondly, to those who saw it negatively and did not want to be associated with the term. This finding points out if nothing else the cultural differences. Firstly, Finnish language does not separate the terms entrepreneur and manager-owner, but uses the word 'yrittäjä' interchangeably between the two and the differences between the two need to be supported by explanations (as in fact the entrepreneurs in my study do!). Secondly, the concept 'entrepreneur' is viewed very positively in Finland that is the general attitudes towards entrepreneurship are rather positive (Hyrsky 1999, Arenius – Autio 1999, Arenius – Autio – Kovalainen 2001) as opposed to the explanation given in the UK study where the image of entrepreneur is considered exploitative and is associated particularly with the 1980s' and Thatcher's Britain. Similarly, my study also dealt with male entrepreneurs and employers so it covered a wider range of entrepreneurs than in the Cohen and Musson (2000) article. Nevertheless, the female sole entrepreneurs that were part of my study did not refute the use of the term. In this sense I could argue

that this echoes the positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship in Finland, and the position of an entrepreneur is easily adopted.

2.1.5 Identity as a life plan: from the past to the future

Locke emphasised past recollection and at the same time failed to give any place for future projection in identity matters (Williams 2000, 81). Future has only lately been given meaning in the identity discussion by claiming that identity in fact is not a state, but it is a project, a subjective achievement, a personal search. Berger et al say that the role is played by individuals' own life plans. Their projection of their own biography is what relates them to the meaning of society. The life plan is the primary source of identity in modern society and the variety of modern identities can be seen to reflect the idea of a life plan. There seems to be openness; i.e. people seem to be open to change and transformation in identity throughout their lives. When this is taken in the context of careers and professional choices there is even a normatively laid out principle governing current thinking: We are instructed to be open to the idea of having more than one career and it is estimated that every person in the current society will have three or four careers in their lifetime. Biography can be seen as 'the realisation of a number of possible identities' (Berger et al 1974, 73 cited in Williams 2000, 40). Human beings are capable of envisioning alternatives – to conceive other ways of acting and being (Bruner 1990, 110). The realisation of the self gathers together what has been, in order to imagine what one will be and to judge whether one wants to be this (Polkinghorne 1988, 154).

This idea is also helpful in analysing and interpreting my data. I discuss the future with all of the entrepreneurs and they see their future as continuing being entrepreneurs, or at least they have great difficulty in seeing themselves working for other employers. If they were no longer being entrepreneurs they would prefer to engage in other future projects (e.g. retirement, or another entrepreneurial project). Bruner (1990, 109) cites Gergen in saying that human reflexivity allows us to turn around the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in the light of the present. Neither the past nor the present stays fixed in this reflexivity. Similarly, our aspirations of the future need to be seen in the light of the present. For remaining the same and retaining the entrepreneurial position negotiated in the interview and to give meaning to being an entrepreneur now it seems that it is impossible to narrate that one could work as an employee in the future. Nevertheless, some of the entrepreneurs in the study have abandoned the entrepreneurial position at least for a short

period of time but these are narrated either as ‘an experiment’ that led back to entrepreneurship, or as a must due to a personal life situation but the future is always in entrepreneurship.

Fournier and Lightfoot (1997) are interested in how people engineer or produce a sense of being a family business owner. In their study it is suggested that the universal truth of conflicts between family and business are mythical but owner-managers applied discursive strategies to weave family and business together by flexibly and continually rearranging the components to provide coherent, contextual accounts of their actions. (Fournier – Lightfoot 1997, 30-31.) This focus on how people construct identities for themselves leads us to the notion of identity work. Identity work is about the way people position themselves in discourse, how they attach themselves to certain issues, using and combining texts and materials, to articulate and give meanings for themselves and their actions. Identity is constructed through a positioning in discourse, as a performance created and sustained through textual labour. Identity is not pre-given or fixed – it is always emergent. Identity is continuously produced and negotiated through talk and theorising.

Lindgren and Wåhlin (2001) have particularly looked at identity construction of individuals (although not particularly entrepreneurs) who have changed organisations frequently i.e. what they call boundary-crossing individuals. They see that it is these individuals who need to be particularly reflexive about their lives and themselves compared to others, i.e. their identity work is being facilitated and reinforced and, thus, it can also be made a subject of study. Their empirical material consists of spontaneous accounts of individuals of their ‘journeys’ through work life. The metaphor of a journey was chosen to emphasise the emerging and ongoing nature of identity construction.

2.1.6 Self as narrative (from Polkinghorne)

I rely on the idea of narrative identity – the idea that *identity is the product of, and realised in, narrative accounts of individuals’ past, present and future*. The narrative account is linked to the action – I do not consider it as a mere product of the human thought but much of what is being narrated are stories of what has happened, taken place, what actions were taken to lead to a particular situation. (Bruner 1990, 105.) In this sense only those aspects that are publicly validated become really fateful, because only they enter the interactional reality out of which identities are constructed.

“Wishful thinking bears no offspring, but our actions and appearances become our fate. To be an identified self is to be a displayed self” (Weigert et al 1986, 40-50).

Bruner (1990, 111) states that the narrative turn in investigating the self emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He refers to psychoanalysts Spence and Schafer and their attempts to reconstruct pasts with their patients to help them; the idea of narrative rather than historical truth. The often cited quote from Polkinghorne (1988, 150) succinctly captures the idea of the narrative construction of identity:

“..we achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of the stories and cannot be sure how they end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be.”

The past, present and future tenses bring forward another important tool for analysing and understanding life narratives. A child recognises that the self and the other are of the same kind. It is only with time that it is relevant to make a distinction between the experiencing I of the early years and the objective Me that emerges. Children learn to construct their self-stories through the medium of narrativising experience with others. This means taking an external perspective on the experience, which is constructed through verbal accounts and constitutes the objective me of the autobiographical life story. (Nelson 2000, 191-192.) The narrator tells the story in the here and now and the protagonist acting in the story is the character of the past or the future (there and then). The self as narrator not only tells the story but he or she also justifies why it was necessary that life had gone a particular way. (Bruner 1990, 121.)

2.2 Discussion

To summarise, my approach to identity is that of construction, not of searching for a stable identity. Similar to the ideas presented by Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) I am not studying which of the attributes stay stable but by what means attributes are stabilised and achieved. Returning to the problem introduced by Williams (1999) – what constitutes knowing, and

how can it be constructed into an object of study? I will adopt the idea first presented by Locke and Hume of memory but I link it to the personal biographies remembered and told to me by the interviewees. I am looking at *the socially constructed identities of the entrepreneurs as constituted through linguistic acts and practices, the narrative conversational identity developed in the interaction between the interviewee and myself the researcher*. I do not share the idea that the entrepreneurs in the study reveal, or that I am able to capture the true core selves of the entrepreneurs –who they really are, but rather I see the process approaching the moral project: I study what the entrepreneurs would like me to know of themselves, their being ‘good people’ and maybe their orientation and commitment towards something rather than what they are at the moment. I refute the views of a fixed and stable identity but share an understanding of identity development – change – which takes place in the social context. In this sense an individual may have multiple identities that must be managed or need to coexist within the same identity. That identity must be consistent over time covering the past, present and future, i.e. life must be made meaningful.

In Chapter 4, I will give detailed information of why I chose to study identities through narrative research but as an introductory note; many writers have pointed out the benefits of narrative research in studies dealing with identity – some are even proposing clear suggestions for the increased use of life histories in identity research (Goodson 2001, 129). This is because the narrative approach gives prominence to human agency and imagination (Riesmann 1993, 5). The process of identity creation or development could be understood as a process of self-reflection that unfolds in the interaction between the self and its social context (Wåhlin 1999, 115). Life-stories are tools for life-management, arenas for identity work, where one deals with the relation of the past to the present, searches for the already been and experienced in order to understand and structure the present guided by the wisdom of emotions (Vilkko 1997, 52). In the approach chosen the researcher begins with an understanding of the fragmented nature of identity and builds a text that enables readers to see how the author / narrator / speaker has created a particular identity that is fraught with contested meanings. The challenge for the researcher is to come to terms with alternative realities different from his or her own, not to exoticise them. The researcher reflects back on why some issues and questions are important in terms of a particular identity and others are not. The relationship of the researcher / author to the individual and to the text should be questioned and analysed. (Silverman 2000, 548.)

“Thus a singular view of why someone acted in a particular way is rejected in favor of the creation of alternative interpretation that take into account the fluid nature of identity and the role of the researcher/author in the development of a text.” (Tierney 2000, 539)

3. ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There is a long tradition within entrepreneurship research to focus on individuals, i.e. to take the entrepreneur as the unit of analysis in studies. This is also the choice I have taken in this study but in the following I will explain how my approach differs from the traditional approach and why.

3.1 Descartesian reading of entrepreneurs

3.1.1 Beholders of mythical characteristics

Harré (1998, 10) suggests that there are two kinds of main stories told about human beings: one places the individual, the person in a moralistic story and in the other the individual is as an organism in a biological and molecular story. In my reading the research in entrepreneurship, as stories told about entrepreneurs, can be divided into these general story formats. Most of the research about entrepreneurs falls into the latter category. In the trait theory, individuals are a sum of their traits, and their behaviour is being largely determined by these internal characteristics. So their entrepreneurship is the result of the laws of nature: innate characteristics that determine behaviour. Until the 1990's the characteristics of entrepreneurs were under investigation with the aim of identifying characteristics that are common to all entrepreneurs. (Gartner 1988, 1989, Bird 1989, Kovalainen 1989, Boyd – Vozikis 1994, Baron 1998) In this image, entrepreneurs are solid and unfragmented agents and the individual is entirely synonymous with his or her disposition and people are always authentic and true to themselves. These studies suggest, for example, that entrepreneurs have a strong need for achievement, that they perceive the outcomes of an event to be within their personal control and understanding and that entrepreneurial self-efficacy¹ is a distinct characteristic of entrepreneurs (Brockhaus et al 1982, Chen et al 1998, Kovalainen 1989). Thus, the trait theorists seem to have adopted a very Cartesian approach to self (Wetherell – Potter 1989, 206-219). Discovering that the

¹ Self-efficacy is an individual's cognitive estimate of his or her own capabilities to mobilise motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over events in their lives. It is assumed that individuals tend to choose situations where they exercise high personal control and avoid situations where they have low control.

characteristics frequently found in entrepreneurs tended to be similar to that of e.g. creative personalities led to comparisons between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs but provided another problem: the heterogeneity of entrepreneurs made it more common to find greater differences among entrepreneurs themselves than between other groups of people, e.g. managers (Gartner 1988, 1989, Bird 1989, Boyd – Vozikis 1994, Baron 1998).

Through these studies we have come to know entrepreneurs as the beholders of certain mythical characteristics representing The Entrepreneur as Mitchell (1997) ironically points out “*as the **stork-like** deliver of new business, the entrepreneur acts as a mythic character. Somehow s/he single-handedly “creates new enterprise”² through the use of extraordinary powers. Mere mortals need not apply.*” (Mitchell 1997, 122 emphasis, reference and quotation marks in the original). Thus, I claim that the trait and characteristics theory has contributed to the mystification of entrepreneurs, which is not very constructive. First of all, it makes entrepreneurship rather inaccessible to us ‘mere mortals’ both as a career choice or even as data for research. If understanding is shared only by entrepreneurs and cannot be understood by non-entrepreneurs the entrepreneur remains a mythical, extraordinary person. Furthermore, although we have reached an understanding that the psychological traits’ studies have not provided very strong results it is also argued that had these results been sound in profiling an entrepreneur, they would not have been very useful as the characteristics are considered to be static and stale end-results, not something achieved through, for example, training and development. On the other hand, if the proper set of characteristics had been identified in research it would have lacked predictive power in any case – the psychological characteristics almost never have a determining influence on the decision to become an entrepreneur but the situation-specific variables are more important in influencing the decision (Davidsson 2002, 6-7). Still they continue to be measured. More generally, in the realm of social sciences it could be argued that there are no deterministic causal relationships but the relationships can only be probabilistic because of the existence of the voluntary component in action (Hall J.R. 1999, 139-140). Therefore, an individual with a low risk-taking propensity, external locus of control and low need for achievement may still want to pursue the entrepreneurial career and similarly an individual with the right set of entrepreneurial characteristics may refuse to act as an entrepreneur or the

² Low, M.B. – MacMillan, I.C. (1988) Entrepreneurship: Past research and future challenges. *Journal of Management*, Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 139-161.

option may not even ever cross his mind. So, “*social theories describe only tendencies, not outcomes*” (Hall J.R. 1999, 140).

3.1.2 Organising entrepreneurs into different types

Failing to provide a universal characteristics profile of entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship researchers have also been interested in understanding why all entrepreneurs are not alike, and how these differences could be studied and explained. This has led to the development of archetypes of entrepreneurial identities such as a classic entrepreneur, an artisan entrepreneur, etc. (Pitt 1998, 402). In Finland, it is through these entrepreneurial types that the entrepreneurial identities have been touched upon in entrepreneurship research. In their study Vesalainen – Pihkala (1997) present five different entrepreneurial identities: 1) classical entrepreneur, 2) farmer, 3) intrapreneur, 4) custopreneur and 5) non-entrepreneur identity (see also a similar type of categorisation of entrepreneurial identities in Melin 2001, 171). Similarly, in her discussion of career anchors and their relation to the different identities (or types) of entrepreneurial careers, Lähteenmäki (1997) identifies four main anchors that are easily linked to the pursuing of entrepreneurial career at some point in the individual’s career (Technical – functional anchor, Leadership anchor, Creativity – entrepreneurship anchor and Challenges – self-development - anchor). In addition, the four remaining anchors (Independence anchor, Devotion, desire to help anchor, Security anchor and Life-balance anchor) are seen to be more rare in relation to entrepreneurs, for example, an entrepreneur is not seen to be security oriented or be devoted to leading a balanced life. This could be a point of argument when discussing my material as for Marge the issue of regaining security in her life is a major motivator towards her entrepreneurial career (6.5, p. 202) and for Eliza, the issue of life-balance is an important factor in her life (6.3, p. 160). Similarly, in another study it is argued that securing the care-taking identity was an important element in the construction of the entrepreneurial career story of a nurse starting up a care centre for the elderly. By becoming an entrepreneur she could carry out the caring activities in an ethical manner. (Harju – Hytti – Korvela – Mäki 2002.) It could be that it is the turbulence in working life and the related impacts on individual careers that also help other than the ‘most typical’ entrepreneurs to engage in entrepreneurial careers, thus, changing our understanding of what a ‘typical’ entrepreneur is; i.e. the types that have been presented in other studies cannot be considered as fixed but fluid and under constantly open to renegotiation.

Therefore, from the identity approach applied in my study these ‘identities’ or types as I have chosen to call them here reflect the realist, Cartesian view of identities where an identity is considered to be a fixed state of existence (compare to p. 21). The above studies have referred to the entrepreneurial types and the difficulty or easiness of individuals to identify themselves with these different types. The idea of identification is, nevertheless, interesting. It is suggested, firstly, that to become an entrepreneur an individual needs to see that the option exists and, secondly, that a person needs to identify him- or herself with a certain type of an entrepreneur in order to become one. (Vesalainen et al 1997, Leskinen 1999, 63, Vesalainen – Pihkala – Jokinen 1999.) As a result, Åkerberg (1999, 10) suggests that individually meaningful role models and governing stereotypes are of interest when studying entrepreneurship especially because in the area of entrepreneurship a lot of stereotypes and institutional thought structures exist. Others can serve as models because their lives already serve as an accomplishment (Carr 1986, 113). However, entrepreneurial types are suggested to provide only superficial explanations and the necessity to provide richer, subtler and contextually grounded explanation is put forward (Pitt 1998, 402). A certain type of entrepreneur may provide a starting point for identification but the identification does not end there, entrepreneurs will make sense of their entrepreneurship through integrating it into their lives and other identities. For example, Marge applies the type of an entrepreneur providing professional services in her entrepreneurial identity story but it nevertheless needs to coexist with her past journalist career and identity (6.5, p. 202).

3.2 Social constructionist reading of entrepreneurs

3.2.1 Entrepreneurship as a role

The so-called trait studies aimed to capture something that is more or less static, and the underlying assumption was that entrepreneurs are born as entrepreneurs, or at least entrepreneurial characteristics develop very early in the life of the individual. With the help of the identity theory we may abandon these assumptions. This approach enables us to view the individual holistically and may well help us to interpret some of the decisions and actions more accurately than by looking only at the individual as an entity that is an entrepreneur (a fixed state of existence) (See also Gartner 1988). The Goffmanian tradition of looking at identity as representations of self, or as roles is also an interesting point-of-view as it

could involve the potential of *treating the entrepreneurial role as one of the roles* of the individual among the other potential roles (that of parent, daughter/son, scout leader, etc.). In organisational studies the professional or occupational identity is considered very important, and it may be more important to the individual than an identity based on gender, age, race etc. (Ashforth – Kreiner 1999, Hogg – Terry 2000). The participants in this study frequently make use of other roles in constructing their story; for example being a mother and a wife is woven into the entrepreneurial stories of the women researched.

The view that identities are constructed and enacted to specific audiences and specific situations could be helpful when studying the emergence of entrepreneurship or nascent entrepreneurs. It acknowledges their struggle for the legitimacy of their business, which is highly linked to the legitimacy of the person as a potential supplier, bank loan applicant etc. and will require the nascent entrepreneur to act non-equivocally in equivocal situations (Katz - Gartner 1988, Gartner et al 1992). In this study, the participants engage in portraying themselves as good and professional entrepreneurs by applying different strategies, for example, telling stories of themselves as young, naïve and unprofessional protagonists and underlining the difference between the past and now.

From this perspective the individual enacts and performs an entrepreneurial role. Role theorists argue that the self is a social product. People have different parts to play in society, which require different manifestations of self or different personalities, and individuals have the ability to play many parts and assume many guises. The individual is fragmented into a multiple set of possibly discordant identities. (Wetherell – Potter 1989, 206-219.) This strand of research – although strong within psychology – has not so far gained so much interest in entrepreneurship.

3.2.2 Entrepreneurship as a career / a profession

The role theory assumes that being an entrepreneur is one the roles an individual has. Investigating entrepreneurship from the career perspective implies that becoming or acting as an entrepreneur is a career move like the choice of any other profession rather than as a singular unique event (Lähteenmäki 1997, 131-132). Dyer (1994) also suggests that there should be research into entrepreneurial careers and offers many alternatives for such studies, for example, research on factors influencing and motivating someone to start an entrepreneurial career, research on socialisation processes for entrepreneurs, different orientations towards career, significant roles assumed by entrepreneurs during their careers and

better understanding of the dilemmas of accommodating different roles. (Dyer 1994, 7-21.)

This approach might also help to demystify entrepreneurship by taking it as a phase in the career of a person. So far this approach is not very widely studied but given the changes in organisational life it will increase its importance in the future. (See e.g. Dyer 1994, Cohen – Mallon 2001, Mallon - Cohen 2001.) From this perspective it is also possible to investigate entrepreneurship as an escape from something (dissatisfaction with organisational life, lack of further opportunities for career progression) rather than a keen interest towards entrepreneurship. Traditionally there have been studies both in the field of entrepreneurship and career theories through the push and pull dichotomy. However, this seems to be too reductionist an approach and it could be more interesting to study them as opposite sides of the same coin, both being present in all of the entrepreneurial decisions. This could be seen for example in the story of Jonathan (6.2, p. 139) where he describes entrepreneurship as a highly attractive career alternative by painting the alternative futures in the organisational environment (university, school) in an undesirable light. The important insight given by this kind of reasoning, however, stems from not mystifying or glorifying the move into entrepreneurship.

3.2.3 Focusing entrepreneurial identities

Although research dealing with entrepreneurs and their identities is still very limited, there are some interesting pieces of research done in the field. The prominence of linking identity theory and entrepreneurship research has been acknowledged. Wåhlin (1999, 136) writes that

“the need for connections between recent development in identity theory and entrepreneurship, in order to open up new spaces and challenges for theorising about entrepreneurship. The process of becoming an entrepreneur cannot be reduced to a question of a rational choice in a society with changing conditions for working life”.

Fournier and Lightfoot (1997) are interested in how people themselves construct an entrepreneurial identity through identity work by investigating how owner-managers experience a family business and how they constitute themselves as family business owners. This approach, therefore, at least partially frees the researchers from pre-setting the categories and imposing their own constructions on the participants. An interesting question related to the difficulty of defining an entrepreneur is; do we

need overall, universal definitions of entrepreneurship, or are we, rather, encouraged to seek the definitions the practitioners themselves use (and how these definitions will eventually change over time)? *Performative definitions* are based on an assumption that the phenomenon is too elusive and, therefore, a description of its characteristics is impossible (Czarniawska-Joerges 1991, 287, Kostera 1997, 347). An important aspect of entrepreneurship research of identity development is that it involves an idea that making sense of entrepreneurs requires knowledge of how the owner-managers make sense of themselves (Kelemen – Lightfoot 2000, 88). In this study I have applied a loose framework for locating the entrepreneurs for the study but it is the aim of the study to analyse the content and meaning given to entrepreneurship by the participants.

Another interesting implication of identity to entrepreneurship and its definition is distinguishing between the identity (the production of an idealised conception of what an entrepreneur is?) and its practical treatment in the field. In this line of thinking the concept is being negotiated constantly by various partners (public opinion, authorities, scholars, etc.), and in practice the idea is then applied to individual cases by e.g. social security offices, tax authorities in different ways (Phillips – Hardy 1997). Therefore, it could be useful to study not only how the entrepreneurs define themselves, but also how other people, especially those that interact with entrepreneurs, see and define entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs in different situations. In this study, however, it is the entrepreneurs and their self-definitions that are focused on. The participants, however, engage in their stories to portray how and under which conditions their entrepreneurial identity has been accepted in the field.

Johansson (1997, 1999) looks at identities of entrepreneurs as clients to advice and consultancy services. His work provides some interesting ideas on the use of multi-perspectives in the study of identities as he uses three different approaches - normative, narrative and Foucauldian power approach to analysing identities of the entrepreneurs as clients. He analyses stories of entrepreneurs and seeks to uncover hidden meanings in their concepts of advising. He sees the stories of entrepreneurs as a means of constructing identities of entrepreneurs as clients.

Lindgren (2000) studied the identity development of female teachers starting up private schools and hence also adopting the entrepreneurial position. In her study it is possible to find similarities and differences between the participants but regarding the entrepreneurship the common element was that it was constructed as ‘a humane entrepreneurship in an idealised form’ where caring for others, in this case school children, was

the primary goal and the entrepreneurship was not the end in itself but a means to fulfil the primary aim (see also Harju et al 2002). The understanding derived suggests that it may not be relevant to always consider the entrepreneurial identity representing the business side as the primary one but it may be adopted to secure and realise another identity (see for example story of Marge (6.5, p. 202). Thus, the focusing on the amalgam of identities is more interesting than focusing on only one of them.

3.3 Entrepreneurial processes

3.3.1 Behavioural approach to entrepreneurship

As a general criticism to studying characteristics of entrepreneurs Gartner (1988) points out that by aiming to answer *why* certain individuals start firms has somehow led to the situation that we as entrepreneurship researchers have aimed to answer the question with *who* (see also Kovalainen 1989). Instead, Gartner suggests we turn to the behavioural approach, and look at what entrepreneurs do, and view the creation of an organisation as a dynamic process of which the entrepreneur is a part (Gartner 1988). The suggestion has been taken seriously and entrepreneurship has recently been studied especially as *an intentional, planned behaviour*. In its simplest form intentions predict behaviour whilst some attitudes predict intentions. Yet, interestingly intentions and attitudes were seen to be dependent on situation and person. There is a conceptual overlap between intentions and opportunity identification. Intentions represent a vehicle for gaining new insights into the processes by which we identify opportunities. (Krueger et al 2000.)

Accordingly, Shane and Venkatamaran (2000) suggest that the focus of entrepreneurship research should be on the opportunities and on discovery, assessment and exploitation of those opportunities. Individuals should be seen as people discovering and exploiting opportunities. Thus, currently entrepreneurship researchers should study entrepreneurship as an *action* not through *individual* or individual characteristics (Shane - Venkatamaran 2000, Low – MacMillan 1988). The question arises that will these suggestions by Gartner (1988) and Shane & Venkatamaran (2000) leave any room for studying the individual? In Gartner's (2001) interpretation, Shane and Venkatamaran focus on individuals and opportunities (see also Shane – Venkatamaran 2002) but in my interpretation the suggestions made by Shane and Venkatamaran do not really take the individual into the focus – they focus on the process of which the indi-

vidual is a part, and it is not about the entrepreneur and his process of becoming and acting as an entrepreneur, which is my focus in this study. To take an analogy from the film industry the difference between the two is that of the leading and supporting role.

Ucbasaran, Westhead and Wright (2001) suggest the contextual and process issues are of importance. In the article, the authors also suggest that there is a need to study entrepreneurial success also from the individual level (entrepreneur). This is because the 'objective' financial performance characteristics (turnover, growth figures) may be a mismatch with the personal expectations, skills and aspirations of the individual entrepreneur. If the entrepreneur who has set-up the business does not want to expand the enterprise, the growth of the company could be considered as a failure of the entrepreneur to control his company. Failures and exits are difficult to study from a firm level as there are no universally accepted definitions and an entrepreneur's exit from the company may result of other reasons than a failure of any kind, e.g. from simply his or her wish to invest in another more lucrative business. Hence, qualitative approaches are called for, that would allow for the separation of the contribution of individual entrepreneurs from the entrepreneurial process and performance. (Ucbasaran et al 2001, 68-69.) In this study I have focused on the entrepreneur, the individual, and it is through the individual's story that I have analysed the entrepreneurial process. In these stories, I will also discuss factual data (like turnover, number of employees) in order to inform the reader of the context that is also applied in the interpretation of the stories.

3.3.2 Entrepreneurial learning and sensemaking

Entrepreneurial learning is often understood as a form of experiential learning (following mostly trial and error decision making). It is suggested that entrepreneurs learn by experimenting. The very simple conclusion made on this is that if a particular experiment is a success, they will repeat it and if it is a failure, they will learn from it and not repeat it (Minniti – Bygrave 2001, 13-14). The idea proposed is that through experimentation, the abilities and skills of the individual are improved and an entrepreneur learns to become a (better) entrepreneur. However, for the purpose of my study entrepreneurial learning is not just acquiring some skills or learning to act in a particular way but is also about learning who we can be, about constructing identities of who we want to be and working towards enacting these storied identities. Learning is a form of becoming, a future-oriented thinking process of creating a prospective

reality where knowing, acting and sense-making are interconnected (Rae 2000, 151). In this sense it is recognised that there is no obvious point at which one suddenly becomes an 'entrepreneur' and it may even be argued that the most significant learning takes place and continues to take place after entry into the entrepreneurial position (Watson 2001, 222). For example, Marge felt that due to her background her entrepreneurial identity was quite weak. However, after working as an entrepreneur for a year she is much more confident as a person and in her entrepreneurial role or identity.

Furthermore, researchers have suggested that we should study how we learn to perceive the opportunities for entrepreneurship (Krueger et al 2000). Looking at identity development and entrepreneurship process as *a sense-making process* could reveal something in this sense as well. Sense-making means that a reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs. Sense-making emphasises that people try to make things rationally accountable to themselves and others. (Weick 1993.) Most sense-making research has focused on how people come to understand those events in which they are currently, or have in the past, participated, how individuals attempt to structure the unknown. A useful way of understanding sense-making is as a narrative process. Sense-making is accomplished through narratives, which make the unexpected expectable and which assist individuals to map their reality (Brown 2000).

3.3.3 Organising of entrepreneurship

In this study I have adopted the view that language is a constituent of our actions, and indeed a word is a deed (Steyart 1995, 82). In this vein, it must be noted that the language of entrepreneurship needs to be dynamic, not static. Therefore, some researchers in the field have applied the concept of 'entrepreneurship' as opposed to 'entrepreneurship' to reflect the process view of entrepreneurship. Earlier I criticised the characteristics' studies for their static view on entrepreneurship, which left me with a need to offer a solution. Steyart (1995) proposes that organising of the entrepreneurship can be concretised through five subdilemmas; 1) motivation dilemma, 2) rout dilemma, 3) route dilemma, 4) time dilemma and 5) management/non-management dilemma (285-305). The use of dilemmas is appropriate since it enables a view on the process of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial decision-making not as a static, linear, on/off, and/or process and decisions but rather highlights the discontinuities, paradoxes and dualities inherent in the entrepreneurship process (Steyart

1995, 82). For example, in the motivation dilemma the entrepreneur is confronted with questions and doubts at the personal level when pondering whether to start or not. The entrepreneur constructs arguments if and how the enterprise can be started with talks with professionals and friends similarly considering the option of not getting started at all. This general formulation can take many forms. For example, the decision of becoming an entrepreneur may be facilitated and the risks lowered by the entrepreneur remaining at his previous job while starting the business activities as in the story of Jonathan in this study (6.2, p. 139). From this example it is also made evident that the motivation dilemma is not only present before launching a venture but it is maintained in the process. Similarly, financial or other difficulties or attractive job offers may cause the entrepreneur to ponder about his or her career, whether to continue as an entrepreneur or go work somewhere else. (Stayart 1995, 286-287.) This is a very interesting idea that I have also aimed at incorporating it into my study: the entrepreneurial processes are filled with paradoxes and dilemmas.

3.3.4 Time and place – the context for entrepreneurship

The entrepreneurs have been studied and research results reported as if the entrepreneurs and related research results could be transferable into any context or environment. Yet we know that entrepreneurial activity differs both in quality and quantity between nations and even regions in a given country and in different times.

I agree with previous writers that analysing the process and the context are also of importance and this insight is incorporated in my approach (Low – MacMillan 1988, Shane - Venkatamaran 2000, Ucbasaran et al 2001). The focus when studying the development of entrepreneurial identity will be the *interaction of the individual and his/her environment*. This approach enables us to take into consideration the values, attitudes, and beliefs towards entrepreneurship; the enterprise discourse in the current Finnish society. The paradox at the moment is that in Finland we seem to be very positive of the idea of entrepreneurship in general, yet very few follow the path and actually become entrepreneurs (Arenius – Autio 1999, Arenius et al 2001, see also Mäki – Vafidis 2000).

Time in entrepreneurship can be linked to two separate processes. Firstly, the meanings and contents for entrepreneurship in different places can change over time. For example in Finland, there has been a dramatic change in the general attitudes, both political and laymen's attitudes towards entrepreneurship. Until the 1990s' entrepreneurial activity

was not generally appreciated but entrepreneurs were regarded as exceptional and somewhat obsessive people. On one hand, succeeding as an entrepreneur was resented by other people as a sort of 'begrudgery', and on the other hand, unsuccessful endeavours may have caused embarrassment or ridicule. The severe economic depression in the early 1990s', however, changed the story completely. (Hyrsky 1999, 16.) Now entrepreneurship is brought forward as a solution to nearly all problems confronting the economy (Hyrsky 1999, 31), such as unemployment and restructuring taking place in large companies and in the public sector that are seen to leave room for more entrepreneurs. This current positive attitude is reflected in the interviews I carried out. The entrepreneurs share a belief that politicians and, for example, former school friends value entrepreneurship. Time is, however, present in the stories in other ways: for example, the entrepreneurs are of different ages, and hence they have made their educational choices in different times – some routes that would currently be 'possible' for a young man or woman were not socially accepted in another time.

Another aspect of time deals with the process nature of entrepreneurship. For a long time entrepreneurship researchers have been encouraged to take a more dynamic view of entrepreneurship as a process that occurs over time (Low – MacMillan 1988). This need is grounded in thinking that over time entrepreneurship does not remain stale but it changes. Some researchers that translate entrepreneurship as merely a new venture creation claim that the entrepreneurship ceases to exist at the expense of small business management (Carland et al 1984, Stewart et al 1999). Those who focus on entrepreneurs, however, see that as the business grows or matures the entrepreneur needs to assume new roles and the balance between the entrepreneurial roles with his or her other roles changes (Dyer 1994). The entrepreneurial stories that I present in this study will give strong support to this proposition. In the more mature businesses the entrepreneurs are adopting new roles that focus outside rather than inside the company whereas in the young start-up companies the focus is very much on assuring the continuity of the business and struggling with the everyday problems which leaves little room for reflecting one's own role in the company.

Generally the need to conduct more studies with a process focus has induced the need for longitudinal research settings. However, efforts in this line have been rather modest due to difficulties in carrying them out. In my study the process aspect is incorporated but not as a longitudinal setting. The stories of entrepreneurs cover the past, present and future of their entrepreneurial life.

In their theoretical model explaining why and how individuals decide to become entrepreneurs, Minniti and Bygrave (1999) incorporated place in the model. Besides the initial subjective endowment of the person, the objective and community-specific institutional and economic circumstances as well as the existing level of entrepreneurial activity in that community - as subjectively perceived and evaluated by the individual - are taken into consideration. The argument is that

“...the level of entrepreneurship also causes the development of a “culture” of entrepreneurship and, therefore, that the level of entrepreneurial activity itself, together with legal and economic factors, is an important explanatory variable of entrepreneurship levels’. In other words, we suggest that entrepreneurship, like many other phenomena, creates a “memory” of itself which, becoming a social habit, influences individual behavior.” (Minniti-Bygrave 1999, 47-48 quotation marks in the original)

It is possible to make two different observations from this idea – firstly, that it is not the same to be an entrepreneur in any environment but different communities provide different opportunities for it and, secondly, that it makes a difference how an individual perceives and evaluates the existence of entrepreneurial activity in the community. This idea is also useful as a background assumption for my study although I reject the aims of generalisation and causality. I would also add that not even the economic environment is an ‘objective’ factor in the ‘model’, but it also needs to be subjectively perceived by the entrepreneurs.

To summarise, the stories in this study are open to different interpretations that link to the time and place for entrepreneurship. Firstly, they can be read as contemporary stories reflecting the place (Finland, a particular region) and time (covering the period from the mid 1980’s until the turn of the century) that provide the basis for particular entrepreneurial stories: stories of redundancy and unemployment, of a bankruptcy, of high-tech entrepreneurs. Secondly, the individual stories incorporate elements that reflect time and place as important elements in their stories (a community gives boundaries to occupational choices available, or the economic situation at the time limits career alternatives) and thirdly, the individual stories provide readings of how time and narrative are applied to make sense of the entrepreneurship and to tell a story of how the entrepreneurship has changed with the time and the experience and learning which has taken place.

3.4 Abandoning A Theory and the Essential Entrepreneur

Throughout the history of entrepreneurship research the need to develop an entrepreneurship theory or a paradigm has been put forward as an ideal and ultimate aim for the field (Bygrave 1989, 7). Entrepreneurship researchers have been frustrated with the very profound problems attached to the field of research. These include e.g. the lack of agreed-upon definitions (Carland et al 1988), heterogeneity of the field, very complex relationships and a large number of potential contingencies of the phenomena to be studied. Due to these problems it has been concluded that there is no unifying theory (Davidsson 1992). Until recently this lack of a theory was considered to be a problem that needed to be urgently resolved by creating one in order to amplify the importance of entrepreneurship as a distinct academic field. Therefore, entrepreneurship research (like areas such as humanities, education, management) was understood to be in the pre-paradigmatic phase both in content and in methods in the Kuhnian sense (Tranfield – Starkey 1998, 344).

However, much of the frustration about the ‘infancy’ of entrepreneurship research seems to be based on much more pragmatic reasons than the academic and theoretical urge to develop the field as a science. Since the field has not been able to develop agreed-upon definitions and methods its place in the university hierarchy is quite weak and, therefore, the entrepreneurship research community’s frustration is linked to the minor role it is awarded in the rankings, prestige and respect within the universities as a field of research. (See for example Low 2001) I have no doubt that this is true, however, I am not at all convinced that we should normatively try to arrive at a consensus merely to strengthen our own status.

Turning back to the more theoretical discussion it seems that the turn of the century also turned another page in entrepreneurship theory development. Gartner (2001, 27-39) and Kovalainen (2001) quite clearly point out that in fact we have a field with a divergence and multitude of both theoretical assumptions and methods that are grounded in very different ontological and epistemological assumptions and, thus, they cannot be grouped into or even be seen leading to a comprehensive theory of entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Steyart and Bouwen (2000) suggest that the drive towards the unification and formulation of an overall theory should be abandoned and we should radically choose the situation where we aim at producing locally valid accounts (see also Eriksson – Pietiläinen 2001a). So, the achievement of a unified entrepreneurship theory is an illusion and can never be reached. Clearly, this abandonment of “A theory”

gives room for other, complementary point-of-views (Gartner 2001, 27-28).

This discussion can be analysed in reference to Bygrave's (1989) article written more than ten years ago. Although Bygrave does not abandon the entrepreneurship paradigm as a goal, he clearly points out that 'less physics envy, more empirical models, more field research, more longitudinal studies' are in order at this stage of entrepreneurship research and less emphasis should be given to normative demands or artificial theoretical models for an overarching entrepreneurship theory.

The alternative of developing 'a theory of entrepreneurship' would in my mind be *the more open and frequent use of other disciplines to study the phenomenon of entrepreneurship*. Naturally, the former studies in the field have borrowed from other fields, such as psychology, sociology and economics. However, the problem has been that this 'base' has been forgotten and entrepreneurship research that has roots in the e.g. psychological traits studies has not maintained the link to psychology but the theory development has continued within entrepreneurship research. This has meant that often researchers in entrepreneurship have been ignorant about developments occurring in the field of psychology (e.g. Gartner 1989, 28). Thus, I suggest that theories of entrepreneurship should be grounded in psychology and sociology and other fields of research, such as economics. However, the aim cannot be building separate islands and stand-alone fields like 'psychology in entrepreneurship' but the true nature and power of entrepreneurship as an interdisciplinary field needs to be embraced by building stronger links between these different fields (Gartner 1989, 28, Blackburn 2001, 4-5). In this study the suggestion is taken into practice by investigating links between identity theories, entrepreneurship theories and narrative research.

So far this study has focused on two broad domains of research in which I want to anchor my research, namely identity and entrepreneurship discussion. In the identity chapter I hypothesised that identity development takes place in a social context and my view of the entrepreneur is reflected in the identity discussion: an entrepreneur is not a fixed and static category but it is subject to changes and renegotiations, and it is these definitions that are focused on in the analysis. In the identity approach it is the entrepreneurs that are the focus and their accounts of who they are and how they have come to see and understand themselves in this way. The entrepreneurs actively engage in portraying themselves as good entrepreneurs or more generally as good people whose lives make sense.

I am not attempting to profile the Entrepreneur or even provide classifications for Entrepreneurs. The group of people that mutually call themselves 'entrepreneurs' – the label that I have at least assigned them, may and will have different images of what entrepreneurship is all about, may more or less desire to emulate that image, may be labelled by others differently (Blumenthal 1999, 390). In fact I lean towards the epistemological starting point that due to the (fluid) nature of knowing, the existence of multiple, fragmented, multilayered, conceptual and contextual nature of current identities, it is not possible to arrive at such a portrait of the Entrepreneur. I do not strive for it due to the impossibility of ever achieving it. *I refuse the realist and essentialist search of entrepreneurial identity* – and following Gartner's (1988) title I also claim that 'Who is the Entrepreneur is the wrong question'. He concludes his article by stating that 'the entrepreneur is not a fixed state of existence, rather entrepreneurship is a role that individuals undertake to create organisations' which led him to prioritise the process of entrepreneurship over the individual (See also Shane – Venkatamaran 2000). The next obvious question then is how to study these processes of meaningmaking and construction of identities?

Within entrepreneurship research Blackburn (2001, 6) and Gibb (2000, 30) suggest that the life-cycles of enterprises and entrepreneurs should be made the focus in research because basic assumptions regarding for example business exits and failures are often false but they need to be investigated from a process perspective. The entrepreneur might not cease from trading or engaging in entrepreneurial ventures but could be a serial entrepreneur, or even in the case of financial failure there might be a myriad of reasons that led to the failure. Blackburn (2000) and Gibb (2001), therefore, suggest that we should understand more about the entrepreneurs, their attitudes and their reasons for closing down a business in the business exit case, thus, providing a basis for the study of the individual's processes rather than the business process. In this study, the focus is on the individuals while their businesses remain in the background.

In this study I will apply the narrative approach to the study of entrepreneurs (individuals) that I present in detail in the next chapter. The advantage of the narrative approach is that the question of whether entrepreneurs are born or made is made redundant and interest lies in the construction and enactment of entrepreneurial identities (Rae 2000, 146). Narratives offer access to the most fundamental and important form of human cognition – that of understanding our lives and ourselves (Drakopoulou Dodd 2002, 522).

4. NARRATIVE RESEARCH AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR MY STUDY

4.1 Introduction to narrative research

The array of methodological problems in entrepreneurship research is well documented in various articles and books and I have discussed these problems in Chapter 3 starting from p. 35. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the potential of narrative research in overcoming some of the problems attached to entrepreneurship studies, and to provide new insight into entrepreneurship through narrative research. I also present the reasons for and benefits of my methodological choices, but I try also to discuss some limitations that these choices create.

Any methodological choices and decisions are consciously or unconsciously based on epistemological and ontological choices. Epistemological and ontological commitments have implications, firstly, on the research process and analysis of empirical data, secondly, on the choice of research problems and, thirdly, on the ways we ask the research questions and in the ways we address them (Kovalainen 2000). Many current writers in social sciences have quoted the idea of narrative knowing presented by Jerome Bruner (1986, 1990) (see e.g. Murray 1989, Johansson 1997, Czarniawska-Joerges 1995, Czarniawska 1999). Bruner (1986) contrasts narrative knowing with the traditional logico-scientific form of knowing. Narrative knowing is connected to the idea that the world is socially constructed by means of language. We use language to build narratives out of the stream of our ideas and things we do or things that happen to us. Czarniawska (1999) claims that the narrative mode of knowing consists of organising one's own experience with the help of a scheme that assumes the intentionality and intelligibility of human action. Narrative is the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite (Polkinghorne 1988, 13). Riessman (1993, 3) defines narratives as talk organised around consequential events. A teller in the conversation takes a listener into a past time or world and recapitulates what happened by making a point, often a moral one. It is easy to illustrate this by using an example from my own field study:

- 1) The first shipment of material was spoiled.
- 2) Entrepreneur cried.

When the events 1 and 2 are built into an understandable narrative ‘The first shipment of material was spoiled, which made the entrepreneur cry’ we understand that these two events are interrelated and the entrepreneur is not crying out of joy or due to some family matter.

Narrative mode of knowing relies on sequentiality and the temporal ordering of events suggests some causality. Narrative has a plot, a storyteller and an assumed reader, i.e. the discourse is linked to a particular situation. (Czarniawska-Joerges 1995.) Narrative research is not a particular method, but it encompasses various types of studies, which also implies that there is a disagreement about the precise definition of narrative. However, according to Riessman (1993), scholars agree that sequence is necessary, if not sufficient, for narrative. In this sense a narrative is always an answer to the question – ‘and then what happened’? On the other hand, there are views that the theme over-rides time – an episodic narrative is woven together through a theme rather than by time. In this study I work on the basis that narratives are thematical and sequential. I am interested both in the themes the entrepreneurs include in their stories and the ways the entrepreneurs construct their meaning in time (what led to what).

A narrative explanation or interpretation consists of attempts to relate an event to human projects ‘She did not get the job because the ageist, racist and chauvinist management chose a young male graduate for the job’ instead of recognising the event as a general law or a category ‘It is difficult for unemployed women over 40 to get a permanent job’. Sense-making, on the other hand, refers to the attempts to integrate new events into the plot in a way that it becomes understandable in relation to the context of what has happened (Imitating Czarniawska’s (1998, 5) examples based on my own research material).

The story is told to particular people. In telling about an experience, an individual is also creating a self – how she or he wants to be known by the audience. (Riessman 1993, 10.) We all seek to present ourselves to other people that we are good people. Entrepreneurs in today’s society are primarily considered as ‘the good people’, providers of jobs and wealth for their communities. However, narratives can also be used to frame less morally accepted actions in a way to make sense at a given moment in the past and they also provide a means of separating ourselves from that past. ‘When I was younger and started up the company, I made some stupid mistakes, but they were an important learning experiences, and now I know better.’ Also Johansson (1997, 270) attaches the narratives to the search for a moral meaning of life. The narrative form of knowing strives for a morally functioning idea. In this study this is ana-

lysed in the ways the entrepreneurs contribute to developing an ideal for an entrepreneur, the good entrepreneur.

It must be noted, however, that although narrative provides a tool for meaning making, i.e. giving meaning to life events and happenings, these meanings need not to be coherent, unitary and fixed but contradictory, blurred and elusive. The participants may introduce a particular event, which may have had both positive and negative implications on one's life depending on the point-of-view. Blumenthal (1999, 380) expected to receive coherent and linear stories of mothers she had in her study, but in the end was faced with contradicting answers. The contradictions direct our attention towards the dynamic nature of the meaning-making process. Similarly, Cary (1999, 413) was baffled with the unexpected story. In my research process I was surprised by the reluctance of some of my interviewees to engage in a story-telling format that I was expecting. They initiated another kind of story that I was prepared to listen to, which was disturbing at the time of the interview but later was applied in the analysis.

What is the difference between narrative and other types of qualitative research? An ethnography is a written representation of a culture or selected aspects of a culture (lately it has also been used to study certain professions or organisations). Interpretation is the consummate goal of ethnography, because meaning is understood in the social construction realm, where knowledge is significant if it is meaningful. (Berger – Luckman 1976, Van Maanen 1988, 1-12, Rosen 1991.) Riessman (1993,4) distinguishes between ethnographies and narrative research based on their different focuses on events; ethnographic studies focus on the events, not the stories people tell about the events, which is the focus in narrative studies. When drawing the boundaries of various textual analyses applied in social sciences, such as semiotics, hermeneutics, discourse and conversation analysis that share the same idea of social constructivism as narrative research, the latter is interested in how the people themselves interpret events and it is then for researchers to interpret these interpretations. (Riessman 1993, 5.) Narration, rather than just the text, is a starting point in narrative research that embraces also the setting and situation of the story (Deuten – Rip 2000).

Narrative research can, therefore, be seen as an umbrella that covers a multitude of possibilities to carry out research. However, there are some elements that help us to classify narrative research, and to point out the differences between different kinds of narrative research. So, a researcher may apply a narrative methodology in research in different ways. Narratives could refer to a method for data collection, or the way of reporting

the research results or it could also be about conceptualising (entrepreneurial) life as story-making and entrepreneurship theory as storyreading and reflection in the form of literary critique. (See also Czarniawska-Joerges 1995 and Czarniawska 1998, 14-17 for discussion on narratives in organisation studies.) In the following sections I will discuss the role of narrative research in more detail by presenting how I see the role of narrative research for my study and the ways of doing it.

4.2 Narratives as a method for collecting research material

Narratives have become a popular source of data in many areas of research. There are several methods to collect 'narrative' data. In the case of entrepreneurs as in this study, a researcher may choose to explore a multitude of different data that are available without much effort – the stories of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship can be found in newspapers, politicians write and give speeches on entrepreneurs and policy-makers write policy-documents that could be approached as narratives. It would also be possible to invite entrepreneurs to write about their entrepreneurial experiences that could be used in the study as textual narratives.

The option that I chose was to gather narratives through narrative interviewing. In the interviews, the researcher asks questions like 'Could you tell me about that particular event or time?' where the interviewees are invited to provide narratives, not just short answers to the questions. In extreme forms of narrative interviewing the researcher merely states the topic for the interview and gives the interviewee the total freedom to narrate whatever he or she wants. On the other hand, even thematical interviews have been used as a source for narratives (e.g. Hänninen 1999). However, if there are easier ways of gathering narrative data – why conduct interviews? Czarniawska (1998, 20) points out several advantages of doing field-work, but what is relevant in my study is that by going to the field it is possible to study the actual production of the narratives and not just the end product, as e.g. in the case of written accounts. The way the story is being told to a particular audience becomes the focus of interest. On the other hand, when studying e.g. letters that are written to the researcher there are also some hints and traces of the production that may be analysed (Vilkko 1997, Kuula 1999).

Narrative interviewing (as opposed to thematic interviewing) offers some advantages in the interview. The plot and the main concepts are chosen by the person being interviewed rather than the researcher, and

when the interview deals with actual, past events a researcher avoids hypothetical questions like ‘what would you do if you became an entrepreneur?’ or ‘how do you make decisions as an entrepreneur?’ but the persons narrate their thoughts and the events that have taken place. (Czarniawska 1998, 29.) Sometimes narrative interviewing, story-telling or open-ended interviewing are mistakenly believed to overcome all the problems attached to qualitative thematic interviews as they are presented as a method for not imposing and reproducing the categories the interviewer forces on the research participant (Silverman 1985, 162-163, 1993, 95-96). Sometimes, the narratives and stories reproduced are considered to reflect experiences in a more true-to-experience-like-way and a way of coming closer to the true experience (Mishler 1986, 67, Riessman 1993, 46). Thus, the stories are seen to carry a magical potential and access to reveal the truth, the true experience of the narrator. In this study I try to avoid any such claims. Firstly, the interview settings are artificial at least in the sense that they are interview settings. I have approached all my participants as a researcher, a doctoral student who wants to interview them. Secondly, since I framed the context for the interviews and highlighted my particular interest to the interviewees this served as a cue in the interviews and my categories structure the interviews – they are not just any constructs or any life stories, the life stories narrated reflect the particular ‘demand’ and are constructed against that demand. Thus, I try to avoid taking the interview data at face value, but I will examine and probe it, particularly in relation to the tensions and contradictions, which they reveal (see also Cohen – Musson 2000, 36). For example, the frequent use of humour and irony in the story of Timothy (6.6, p. 217) is taken as a point of analysis to understand the irony that is used to mark the contradiction in the story.

4.2.1 Autobiographical narratives and life-stories

One particular type of narrative used as a source is biographies or autobiographies – oral or written narratives of people’s lives. One of the primary sources in life histories in sociology is found in Thomas and Znaniecki’s study in 1918-20 that is said to have ‘established the life history as a bona fide research device’ but interest did not last long because in the 1930s sociologists became more interested in statistical methods on one hand and in ethnographies (situation) on the other. Even turning away from positivist assumptions did not lead to more frequent use of life histories but theories of interactionism and ethnomethodology – linked to situation and occasion. Life history work was not accepted in

modern research because it continuously failed to pass the objectivity test. It was not until the advent of postmodernism and poststructuralism that life stories were adopted particularly in sociological studies, gender studies, cultural studies and literature theory. (Goodson 2001, 130-137.)

Goodson (2001, 139) distinguishes life stories and narratives from life histories. The life story is the first layer – the rendering of the lived experience into a life story. The second layer is the life history – placing the life story into an historical context. This definition of life history makes sense but simultaneously creates a problem. If the lives and identities of people are not cohesive and coherent but as I will suggest in this study lives are fragmented and we need to struggle with existence and the exploration of multiple identities what is then the (singular) historical context that Goodson refers to? Quite often the two terms (life story and life history) are applied interchangeably (Atkinson 2002, 125).

With regard to autobiographies or life-stories produced in interviews we need to ask at least two different questions, firstly, what is the assumed link between the story being told and the life itself and secondly, whether the story is ‘true’ and by what standards could it be regarded as true. There are different approaches in understanding the relation of life and story. Sometimes the relation is seen to be that human life is something that can be told and depicted in stories. In other words, story follows life. From another point-of-view stories are considered as ideals that we try to live up to. In this sense life follows stories. A common element for both of these approaches is that life and story are separable. From an hermeneutical point-of-view story and life are internally related, one does not exist without the other. Human life is interpreted in stories and human life is a process of narrative interpretation. In a way narrative is seen to be constitutive of human experience and action. (Carr 1986, 61, Widdershoven 1993, 1-2, Riessman 1993, 21.) Narrative coherence is the norm or the rule in two senses; firstly in the rather colloquial sense that it is normal, things hang out, we manage, our world is not a chaos most of the time and secondly, in a way that it is the standard against we mirror our lives. When things fall apart it is by reference to our story-like projections that they do so. Thus, the unity of the self could also be seen as an achievement. Things need to make sense, so we strive for coherence of ourselves. We never quite achieve it but we need to be telling and re-telling the story of who we are and what we will be. (Carr 1986, 90-97.) This is reflected in a study by Kelemen and Lightfoot (2000) who view identity as a narrative construction that is a product of the self’s reflexive process. This approach acknowledges that individuals are not only constrained by the events and lived experiences, but also by the limited rep-

ertoire of available and sanctioned stories they can use to interpret and communicate their experiences.

The difference between the biographies and autobiographies is linked to the discussion of trueness in the narratives. The links between memory and history are brought forward. The portal approach assumes that life histories are containers of memories that can be rendered in the interview (linked to the idea of true accounts) and the process examines the cultural scripts and narrative devices speakers use to make sense of their own life experiences. (Tierney 2000, 544-546.) There is a long history in biographical studies in Finland (for example Roos 1987, 1988) to presuppose that the material tells something about the actual events that have taken place and the meanings the person attaches to them (Hänninen 1999). These studies assume a realist point-of-view as the stories of events are considered 'true', which allows the use of triangulation between stories told by different people with other evidence or the use of the interpreter's theoretical understanding as a method for validating the truthfulness of the stories in the interpretation. An example of this is given by Lieblich (1993) of her reasoning to verify whether the story told by Natasha is true or not;

“The admission that she did change “only” vis-à-vis her parents, sounded naïve to me, because as a psychologist I obviously consider this area to be at the core of people's personalities and of utmost significance for their transition to adulthood.” (Lieblich 1993, 114 quotation marks in the original)

The implications of this notion are that Natasha herself is not self-evidently aware of her changing and, therefore, she is not able to tell the true story, whereas the author as a psychologist may apply her general understanding of human personality, her expertise and theoretical knowledge to create a true or at least a truer story than Natasha. The authority lies with the author rather than the narrator.

In her dissertation Hänninen (1999) applies the concept of 'inner narrative' to make a point that she is interested in something that reflects authentically the thoughts and thinking of the person. She considers it important that the interviewed people tell stories to the researcher that are close to the stories that they would tell themselves. In this line of thinking the stories are considered as a window to a person's mind. (Hänninen 1999, 118.) It is relatively easy to provide epistemological and ontological criticism to this kind of presumption by saying that it is not possible for a researcher to get access to people's minds or that the individual mind is just a illusory product of modernity. She herself acknowledges

this criticism, but she does not consider the polarisation of inner and outer narratives as a very fruitful approach, because the very fact that we can understand each other through language means that there must be some links between the two and the fact that the individual mind is a product of its time does not make it an illusion. (Hänninen 1999, 29.) I see the value of her approach and work, but what would be the benefit of this idea of ‘inner narrative’ for my study? For me acting as an entrepreneur it is interesting especially from the point-of-view of how it is presented and represented to other people, how and what entrepreneurs narrate to me (or other people) about their entrepreneurship. Whether this narrative is close to the narratives they tell themselves is not very interesting.

I will adopt another angle when considering the truthfulness of the auto-biographies in my study.

“Interpretation should be able to recognize the various levels of expression and eventually find through other sources, as well, the historical contexts wherein they make sense. The guiding principle could be that all autobiographical material is true; it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, for which purpose.” (Passerini, 1989, 197 quoted in May 1999, 51)

In the media, there are a lot of stories of entrepreneurs. In this sense one might ask why is it important for me to produce these additional stories. In the media, the biographies of the ‘greats’ are often written with a single view and they are presented as super people (Pietiläinen 2001, 87). This unity and interconnection, the story-likedness, is not something that we should expect to find in elements that comprise such a life (events, experiences and action) (Carr 1986, 79-80). This is also a directive for the analysis and presenting the data, whether one directs one’s attention towards the coherence of the stories, or the frictions, contradictions and ambiguity (see also Grant – Perren 2002). The search for the complete and coherent is a delusion although many people narrate their lives aspiring for coherence, for a unitary self. Should we as researchers “reject” this social construction of self (as Lieblich did in her study)? Goodson (2001, 138) provides another angle;

“Rejection is not the issue here, for life history work should, where possible, refuse to play postmodern God. Life history work is interested in the way people actually do narrate their lives, not in the way they should.”

Interestingly, the idea of a ‘true’ account may also distract the person being interviewed. In Johansson’s (1997) study one of the entrepreneurs is less willing to tell his story, because he fears that he is not able to memorise the events correctly and to provide factual experiences, that he is not able to provide a truthful account of his past. This was also the case with Timothy in my research: *‘It would be false to tell about some particular events...’* and after the interview he confirms again *‘If you need to check some questions, please call me. Sometimes I think differently of things on different days, and you may want to verify some particular points.’* This could be interpreted to be the reflection of our interview society where interviews are commonly applied to make sense of our lives, for example, in the media apparently opening a window into the life, feelings and thoughts, (Silverman 2000, 822-823) that Timothy reinterprets as a false attempt by declining the idea that by telling about events he could make me understand what it is being an entrepreneur.

4.2.2 Conducting the interviews

Although in life story interviews the respondent is free to craft their narratives and to construct the interviews, they are not without constraints (see for discussion on the conditions for life story constructions Andrieu 2001, 817). I called or e-mailed to the entrepreneurs to participate in the study – all of them accepted. When calling or sending an e-mail to the people that I wanted to interview I said I was working in the Small Business Institute of Turku School of Economics and Business Administration, and I was interested in studying (stories of) entrepreneurs. I also explained that I would not have a set of questions but my interviews would centre on discussion. After the first interview I wrote an explanatory letter of my approach and I sent it to all of the other participants. In this letter (Annex 1) I explain a little bit more of my approach and my interests. In the interviews there were many occasions where the entrepreneurs responded to that letter rather than told whatever they wanted to tell or replied to my immediate questions in the interview. Also before the interview I briefly explained my approach, that I was interviewing different kind of entrepreneurs with different backgrounds and different kind of stories to tell. So, long before the interviewee said anything the framework for the interview was already set: the interviewees adopted the position of an entrepreneur who was telling a story to a researcher interested in and with a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship. This in fact required the interviewee to tell his or her story in a particular way either by

conforming to what the interviewee thought I would expect or by taking a stand against that expectation.

The interviews took about 1-2,5 hours but the time spent on the interviews feels different. In the short ones the participant is often responding very quickly and with short answers but even in the case of longer answers no time is spent on reflecting, all the answers come ‘prepackaged’. On the other hand in the longer interviews the participants take time to think about things and try to be analytical about their answers, to reflect on them and to offer some explanations.

In most interviews I speak relatively little and the entrepreneurs engage in long ‘monologues’ and I only utter ‘*mmmmh, yes, ...*’ to tell them that I have understood, this is interesting. Sometimes I am surprised and I say ‘*Really?*’ which hints that I am interested in that particular topic. If I have a question the entrepreneur normally cuts my question and starts replying to it. Sometimes this leads to a situation whereby she or he answers another question that I really wanted to ask.

The rule of ‘not speaking’ is, however, cut in the case of Timothy. Timothy refuses to tell ‘a story’ since he believes it would prove false. In the interview I also tell that I’ve graduated from the same school as he has and we have a mutual friend/colleague. These issues influence the interview in that not only entrepreneurship is focused on but also the Master’s studies in the Turku School of Economics and Business Administration, of which we are both ‘experts’. Timothy asks me questions like ‘*what do you think [about entrepreneurship]?*’ ‘*Are there any courses in entrepreneurship now [in Turku School of Economics and Business Administration]?*’ It seems that Timothy is not happy with his role in the interview as the ‘lonely narrator’ who reveals the truth about being an entrepreneur, which he claims he is not able to do. Hence, I shift my position from a listener to a more active participant in the interview, and we discuss for example entrepreneurship studies in ‘our’ school and how they could be made more attractive to students.

Each interview session is a unique one because each participant is different from the next one but also because my role changes in the process. In the first interviews I was more scared about issues that might arise, how to find the thread in the interview as I could not hide behind a set of preset themes or questions and whether they would speak of things I wanted them to tell. My personal notes to myself after the first interview are quite revealing about the turmoil I was going through.

‘The interview is quite irrational; partly it is about Rosemary telling her story, partly it is geared by my questions from here and there. I feel stunned and I wonder if I caught everything that I was

supposed to. I hope the tape-recorder was working. Confusing but I forgive myself (the first interview).’ (My notes written after Rosemary’s interview)

It seems that I am disappointed with the interview in many ways. It is irrational to me as it was not a story told solely by Rosemary, but I participated in it. My way of participation also irritates me as I am not able to maintain a (chronological?) order in my questions but seem to be asking questions in a random order. Seemingly I had hoped to be involved in constructing a story that would be logical and chronological. This creates a feeling of being stunned and wondering if I was able to ‘catch’ everything that I was supposed to.

It is important to notice that not only the identities of the entrepreneurs are being constructed in the interviews but also mine. There are direct or more vague comments that are being addressed to me as a certain kind of a person: my identity is being constructed. In most cases the identity is that of a researcher, for example,

You’ll also become very wise if you’re methodologically up-to-date so you’ll go on with a reputation of a wise person the rest of your life afterwards. (Arthur)

*If you finalise the research your reward will be you not being forced to apply for lots of grants, won’t it. The application, it must be a horrible side of it [research] and well to my understanding quite often in your business **laughter** more time is spent on applying for grants than doing the work, it cannot be the purpose, it must be humiliating, miserable and demotivating when you think that you would like to reach a research result. (Timothy)*

On the other hand I am also paralleled with a 25 year-old-chick in high-heels:

I thought then sorry that you’re here now of course that a 25-year-old-chick comes in her high-heels to babble or to explain to me how the school needs to be run. (Jonathan)

I will discuss the interview settings in more detail in the Chapter 4.4.2, p. 79 and in the beginning of each entrepreneurial story in Chapter 6, p. 115.

4.2.3 Bad material

Any researcher conducting qualitative research must deal with the question of dealing with bad material, i.e. in my case my aim is to collect the stories of the entrepreneurs but what if there is no story or the story is thin? The first option that comes to mind is to dismiss any such material, not to include the narrative in the research. This, however, poses a problem. I have quoted Goodson (2001, 138) above: "*Life history work is interested in the way people actually do narrate their lives, not in the way they should.*" If I dismiss the thin narratives am I not at the same time suggesting that the individual has told his or her story the wrong way, in a way that does not fit my expectation (see also May 2001, 255-257) and hence I exclude it from my material. So, I decided to have another angle on it. Samuel's story could be labelled as 'bad material' as it was structured more like a question and answer-type of situation where I was in the role of a researcher and he was the respondent. In addition, his answers were short or at least were lacking personal elements, storylike incidents and the overall story could be labelled thin (Geertz 1973). The interesting question is whether the participants or individuals in general have the same opportunity to tell their story at all times? It is possible to play with the ideas leading to the mutual problems between Samuel and myself to construct a rich entrepreneurial life story for Samuel. Firstly, the situation at the enterprise was very hectic after the massive growth it had witnessed and Samuel was really busy, finding himself in the eye of the storm and having no place to tell his story. As a result, he had ignored my letter of advice, and, thus, he was not geared towards the 'mood' necessary for storytelling. Alternatively, he may have read my invitation but being in the midst of things he could not enter into it. He was not able to distance himself from the activities but was in the middle of it and consequently there was not yet any story to tell but it would come later (Czarniawska 1998, 29). Or, being a researcher himself Samuel knew what research was all about, but coming from the life sciences he could not understand my invitation to tell a story as a legitimate one but assumed that I was after the 'facts' and the 'truth'.

4.3 Narratives as a method of analysis

The realist analysis is the prevailing form of analysis – by that I mean that the answers of the respondents are understood to reflect the reality – their truthfulness or untruthfulness is under scrutiny in the analysis. In

this type of analysis the triangulation of for example interview answers is relevant. In the context of my study the approach would indicate for example the use of interviews with other people than just the entrepreneur about his or her life to validate the answers. The realist approach is not the only alternative, however. In the narrative analysis, the interviews – the talk and text produced – are analysed by understanding the participants' answers as cultural stories. (Silverman 2000, 824-825.)

Tierney (1999, 307) in his editorial introduction to a special issue of life history research writes:

“The times are unsettled because what social scientists thought they knew, they no longer know. What one assumed was the correct way to present data is no longer accepted without question; even the idea of **data** raises postmodern eyebrows where one questions the meaning of what makes a fact a fact, what makes a text a text.” (Emphasis in the original)

So, the challenge of coping with narrative methods could be labelled as a way of living with ambiguity (Cary 1999, 422). We cannot normalise the stories that are being told, brush off the contradictions by authorising our voice over that of the speaker ('I know she said that but in reality she means other things'). We need to thrive on ambivalence and ambiguity, be aware and be reflective about the interpretations we make. The use of narrative analysis as a method implies firstly that what is being spoken is not the only focus of our interest, but also the way of speaking. This leads us to think that our ways of talking are not neutral, but they propose different roles we have and take, different positions against others and patterns of rights, privileges and obligations (Shotter 1989, 149). Language has three different functions; 1) referential meaning (what is said), 2) interpersonal function (role relationships between partners) and 3) textual function (structure and how parts of text are connected synthetically and semantically) (Riessman 1993, 21). Therefore, I attempt to investigate both the way of speaking and talking and the contents of the speech whilst also keeping in mind my own role as a researcher in the process.

The aim of narrative studies is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. Why was the story told that way? Traditional qualitative analyses often fracture the text in the service of interpretation and generalisation. Researchers analyse themes – what is being spoken – and they organise their reports around these themes. However, as many writers have found, the narrative forms are essential meaning-making structures, hence, these structures need to be preserved, not fractured. (Riess-

man 1993, 2-4.) Then both the ‘what’ and ‘how’ become central in the analysis. On the other hand, besides order and flow with the form of well-developed stories it is interesting to look also at the frictions in autobiographies. In the autobiographical texts that Vilkkko (1997, 166-172) studied the results of memorising are portrayed in text, but also the process of memorising and even structures of it can be found from the texts. This idea of two different times being present in the narrative is an interesting aspect – the time of remembering (present) and the time of the event (past). Thirdly, one can also see that life story interviews also reveal something about the future.

“A life history is like a boomerang; it is thrown from the present into the past and returns with a force bearing it into the future, but the direction and the force is determined by the present and by the form of the life history (the boomerang) itself.” (Järvinen, 2000, 385)

The person telling the story is no longer the same as during the event of the story. In the present we need to explain our motives and meanings of the past in a way that lead to the present. So lived life can never be recapitulated fully but it can only be understood in terms of how it is narrated today. (Järvinen 2000, 385.)

One of the most important features of narratives and narrative analysis is the concept of time. It is considered, firstly, that narrative is the primary way of organising experience of time as well as social existence. Secondly, only from the perspective of the end do the beginning and the middle make sense. (Carr 1986, 4-9.) However, without the past and future there can be no present and thus no experience at all. It is therefore suggested that ‘we can no more conceive of an experience empty of future than one empty of past’ (Carr 1986, 29). The notion of time is therefore crucial in structuring our experience.

How can we then identify narratives from a long flow of speech? Riessman (1993, 16) indicates that sometimes tellers indicate that a story is coming with entry and exit talk ‘this reminds me of a particular event...’ However, narratives in interviews are rarely so clearly bounded and locating them requires the use of the interpretative practices of the researcher. Not all narratives in interviews are stories in the linguistic sense of the term – there are also e.g. habitual narratives (events happen over and over with no peak in the action), hypothetical narratives (things that did not happen) and topic-centred narratives.

The aim and challenge of the analysis of the experience is to identify similarities across the moments into an aggregate, a summation.

“In the end, the analyst creates a metastory about what happened by telling what the interview narratives signify, editing and re-shaping what was told and turning it into a hybrid story.” (Riessman 1993, 13)

In her analysis Vilkkko (1997, 165) detected that some stories or passages in the stories had been told many times before and that they seemed to have become crystallised myths. An example of this can be found from my own study. Overall Rosemary’s story that I analysed seemed a very nice, well-developed story. Being involved in some working groups and projects the story-teller had told the story many times, and these stories had developed into crystallised mini-stories that she had told at many occasions. I performed an Internet search and I found a few presentations from Rosemary on the Internet-sites and publications. In those stories I detected some stories that were identical to those that she told me, and these stories included nearly the same phrasings that I had in my interview material although these mini-stories were written by third persons, journalists.

EXAMPLE 1:³

The materials that I had ordered from abroad arrived in time but to my horror in the first experiments I noticed they had been spoiled. When the others had left home I sat on the pile of materials and cried. How on earth would I ever make it as an entrepreneur when the start was like this. Now Roses Ltd⁴ is doing fine.

EXAMPLE 2

I bought the materials from abroad and noticed that they were spoiled. As a bonus [in the negative sense] there was also a devaluation. Then I sat on the pile of materials and swore that if some day I made it, I would surely help other entrepreneurs.

EXAMPLE 3:

When the first shipment of materials arrived from abroad it was noticed that it was spoiled. When the crew had gone in the evening I sat on the piles of materials and cried. I thought I will never make it as an entrepreneur if the start is this difficult. Then and there I made the promise that if I somehow survived myself I will help others.

³ Since I want to protect the identity of the respondent the sources for these extracts have not been presented in this report.

⁴ The name of the company is fictional.

EXAMPLE 4: [Interview material] (see also 6.1, p. 115)

But you can imagine Ulla my feeling when the first shipment arrived, and I made all the tests, for example how it [the material] tolerates water, how it keeps the colour and then I noticed that it loses colour. When all the others had left the factory at the end of the day to go home I sat on the piles of materials and I cried. I thought that I would never make it as an entrepreneur if the start is like this, losing all the loan money and all, and I cannot even use the materials. But then I pulled myself together, and I have not cried since because of entrepreneurship although I have cried and sometimes laughed for other reasons.

How to analyse and interpret this? The first interpretation is that the event was important for Rosemary and, therefore, it is important for her to tell of this event when asked to talk about her entrepreneurial life and the early years. The similarity of the narratives would, however, suggest that it is indeed a crystallised story, nearly a myth (a source of strength for the teller?) – an integral part of the teller's personal narrative reserve. This is a story that is easy to like – it presents the entrepreneur as a very human and vulnerable, but a strong person, because she has been able to overcome this dramatic problem. Therefore, in the stories written about Rosemary this very story is presented. Rosemary herself has told – and probably also read – this story many times. However, the narrative plot – especially the immediate ending - is not exactly the same in all of the stories, which demonstrates the possibility of creating (by Rosemary) or reading of (by reporters) different versions of the same basic plot to different audiences. Although I do not know who is the writer of these different endings of the narratives regarding the destroyed materials, at least these examples show that different endings are possible even in the case of a crystallised, mythical story. (Table 1, p. 67)

Table 1 The story of Rosemary – early days of entrepreneurship (based on Labov’s model from Riessman 1993, 35)

	Ex1	Ex2	Ex3	Ex4
Orientation / beginning	Materials arrive from abroad	She bought the materials from abroad.	Materials arrive from abroad	Materials arrive
Complicating Action / Problem	Materials are spoiled. Others leave the factory Rosemary sits on the piles of materials and cries: “How will I ever make it as an entrepreneur if it is so hard?”	Materials are spoiled. Rosemary sit on the piles of materials and cries: ...and swears that if she now makes it	Materials are spoiled. Others leave the factory Rosemary sits on the piles of materials and cries: “How will I ever make it as an entrepreneur if it is so hard” and she swears that if she now makes it	Materials are spoiled. Others leave the factory Rosemary sits on the piles of materials and cries: Rosemary thinks that she will never make it as an entrepreneur if the beginning is so hard.
Resolution / Coda	The company is doing fine.	...she will help others to survive.	...she will help others to survive.	She pulls herself together, and has not cried because of her company ever since.

In addition, a researcher must be prepared that the material will consist of different life-stories - some are in themselves more narrative than other narratives (‘stories of how the entrepreneur became an entrepreneur and how it has gone afterwards’), where there is an identifiable plot and the narrator links some events or issues that have been meaningful for her entrepreneurial career. Other ‘life-stories’ lack almost completely any plotted structure, but they are more fragmented talk around entrepreneurship and the enterprise. However, as Järvinen (2000, 389) points out it is very natural for researchers to consider the most coherent interviews as the most credible and useful, because they give immediate meaning and the interviewees co-operate with the interviewer and enter into an objectification of themselves, their past and their problems. In my study, I have chosen to look at the individual stories of the entrepreneurs as they are,

aiming to analyse not only the contents but also the ways they narrate the stories.

4.3.1 Arranging material

After most interviews I made some notes about the interview; about my feelings or positions I had taken or about other things I thought relevant for the analysis. What seems curious now is that after each interview I thought that the interview had brought forward at least one interesting issue that would enlighten the entrepreneurship phenomenon: either by destroying or at least questioning some of the ‘old myths’ related to entrepreneurship or giving deeper meaning to the ‘myths’ or research results found in other studies. I felt exhilarated – ‘this is good stuff’. I felt that the interviews were the closest I could currently get to being an entrepreneur – hearing those stories and experiences and trying to empathise and understand the meaning of those stories and events for the people I talked to. I tried not to be critical or show the very human ‘besserwisser’ by judging the events and the meanings. These are the stories these people want to tell me – it is not my job to tell whether they are true but my job is to account for why it is these are the stories they wanted to tell and why they are told in this way.

After the interviews I transcribed the tapes into text. This I tried to do as carefully as I could by using ‘plain’ text, meaning that I did not apply a notation system linked with discourse or conversational analysis (Psathas 1995, Jokinen – Juhila 1999). I did not use any help for transcribing which was a conscious decision stemming from the idea that I really needed to know my material to be able to do the analysis. Although transcribing is an arduous task – an interview of about two hours took me more than two days to transcribe, especially if the voice of the speaker was low or blurred, I fully enjoyed the moments with the interviews as it gave me a chance of speculating on the analysis. During the interviews I was focused on trying to follow the story-line to be able to maintain the discussion and I sometimes missed some interesting small things that I was able to capture while transcribing. Although I felt that all of the interviews were very interesting, some became dearer to me than others, and within all of the interviews I had my favourite stories. I fully enjoyed the sequences that would cast new insight on the existing understanding and common beliefs about entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. ‘Entrepreneurs do not have to work 24 hours a day’, ‘even a green philosopher can become an innovative entrepreneur’, ‘becoming an entrepreneur can also be translated as a form of social safety’... On the other hand, I was

surprised by the strong presence of family in the female narratives and I resented the men for not naming their spouses as important people for their entrepreneurial careers. Therefore, the arranging of material formed a part of the analysis.

4.3.2 Analysing material

In this study, I rely on the social constructionist view on narratives where the world is seen to be a constituent of individual and socially constructed realities, and narratives are subjective accounts reified as objective knowledge and acts of sense-making (Boje et al 2002). In this view, talk is seen to be more figurative and poetic than representational ‘not about what is it but what might be’ (Cunliffe 2001, 357). Stretching this idea to identities the question is rephrased to cover not only ‘who am I but also who I might be’ (Rae 2000). In this way, people are seen to ‘author’ realities, deal with dilemmas of ‘who to be’, and persuade others to talk or act in different ways.

Self-evident truth of interviews, for example, the media aims to deliver us immediate ‘personal’ experience yet what they – we – want is a simple repetition of familiar tales. Maybe we feel that people are at their most authentic when they are, in effect, reproducing a cultural script. Interview accounts are not representations of the world; interviews can be seen to possess properties of all social interaction deriving from both parties’ employment of their every-day common sense knowledge of social structures. It follows that such properties be investigated and not treated as a ‘problem’. (Silverman 1993, 96-97.)

The storied, performative approach to narrative suggests that we need to pursue the ‘messy’ approach to reading and writing as opposed to the structured analysis – the messy “*approach embraces experimental, experiential, and critical readings that are always incomplete, personal, self-reflexive, and resistant to totalising strategies.*” (Denzin 1997, 246).

My interests in this study are grounded on different sets of questions that I aim to pose to my research material (see for example Jokinen - Juhila 1999, Janesick 2000, 387-388):

- 1) what is being said (the contents; what kind of meanings the participants give to entrepreneurial identity)?
- 2) how it is being said (the format; what kind of strategies, tools and structures are being applied in conveying the meaning)?
- 3) what are points of tension: what does not fit, what are the conflicting points?

- 4) what is the role of the participant – researcher interaction in the meaning making process?

In the analysis I posed these different questions to my research material. As a result I wrote new texts of the transcribed interview texts. This writing served as a way of analysing the interview text. Next I read both the original transcribed texts and my new stories that I had written in order to produce the stories in their current form (Chapter 6). The writing of the stories is not just a ‘writing up’ activity but in writing the stories the analysis continues. In fact, I wrote the stories many times in order to make them interesting to read but also to clearly, yet subtly bring forward the discussions I wanted to raise with the stories. I will give here an example of the original text and the written first-round analysis and the outcome (the story), Arthur’s story (6.7, p. 236), which can be read later in this study. It is of course difficult and even impossible to give detailed and conclusive examples of the analytical tools and the process the researcher utilises when engaging in narrative research since the method relies on the idea that the researcher is the analytical tool that reads the text, visualises the interview situation and context (feelings, sounds, physical movements) and brings in both her personal understanding and theoretical discussions all at the same time into the iterative analytical process but these examples, however, illustrate briefly the process and method of analysing.

Translated transcribed interview text with Arthur: *Then I studied besides working to become a university engineer. This was the accident. It was not goal-oriented but, but always phase after phase a new view opened that was narrow and then I used the view. I did not care so much about the career but I did what looked interesting. I have not regretted it - I may be a bit poorer but richer in experience. I have the longest possible academic education if you count these years, so that this high school track is a real fast track.*

Written analysis: *He became a university engineer by accident - he defines it as non goal-oriented activity, but phase after phase, a new but narrow window of opportunity emerged and he took advantage of these opportunities, not thinking about his career but doing what seemed to be interesting. Arthur seems to interpret himself that he did not see the big picture ever – that when training to become a technician, he never planned on becoming an engineer or of going to the university but each step was necessary for the emergence of the next step. This reinforces the definition of an ‘accident’ introduced by Arthur previously; accident is*

something that is not sought for, aimed at. In the following, Arthur talks about the 'fast track' and it is visible to him now since he has seen his daughter take it [talks about it later].

When writing the analysis I aimed at directing my attention not just on the section I was reading there and then but on the overall interview and the ways the participant points forward or backward to the themes discussed. I also looked at very carefully at my own interventions in the interviews and the kind of responses they generated from the participant. I also tried to link the analysis to the more theoretical questions that were possible to pose of the interview text. From the extract the interest of narrative research on the interpretations of the participant becomes clear and is later subject to further analysis.

I analyse the self-narratives from the point-of-view that these are the stories the entrepreneurs wanted to tell me and it is up to me to discover why it is these stories (and not some others) that are told in this situation in the particular way that they are told. I attempt to avoid 'why' questions that deal with cause-effect relations (e.g. I am not asking why these entrepreneurs have become entrepreneurs) but I focus on how life is structured and constructed into a verbal account - auto-biography – of the person and how to read it (a similar approach has been adopted by Vilkkio 1997). In Carr's (1986, 31) terms "*to understand an action is to know not what caused it but rather what justified it either in general or in the eyes of the agent*". Autobiographies serve as constructions that are made out of life events. The life histories are the starting points for our work and they are already removed from their life experiences – they are lives interpreted and made textual (Goodson 2001, 138). The teller moulds the autobiography to fit into a given occasion, to the given audience – in that sense the life story has not happened in reality, but rather the story is happening to the person who tells it (Vilkkio 1997, 90). Interviewees are not so much repositories of knowledge as they are constructors of knowledge in cooperation with interviewers. Thus, interviews are sites of knowledge production. The present interviews are not the first occasions when the narrators have related their life stories and inquired into the causes and consequences of their behaviour. Thus, the self-portraits given must be seen as only one link in a long chain of identity negotiations in the interviewee's life. Life story narratives are not just ways of telling one's life to others, they are a means of consolidation, strengthening certain parts of our identity and ignoring others. (Järvinen 2000, 370-391.)

I have already stated that narrative analysis is open to the environment, the context which includes the interview setting but also other settings, such as the industry of the entrepreneur, the historical time which is linked for example in the case of my study to the societal and environmental factors influencing entrepreneurship. Hence, the narrative analysis applied in this study represents the holistic-content approach – my objective is to analyse the material (stories of entrepreneurs) to develop a new story. It differs from the narrative tradition, for example, in the linguistic and literary sciences where the focus has been on investigating the linear sequences of the events. (See Table 1, p. 67 for this type of analysis). In the narrative analysis here, the focus has been on the experiences and events that are investigated by posing different questions to the text (Ollerenshaw – Cresswell 2002, 343).

4.3.3 On the matter of voice

The researcher's voice has become a matter of some debate in the field of social sciences lately (e.g. Hatch 1996). In the beginning of my study, my naïve assumption was that I participate in the interviews only as a listener leaving the entrepreneurs relatively free to craft their stories because of my approach (non-thematised interviews). The further I progressed in my understanding of the type of research endeavour I was engaged in, the more I understood my own role in creating the material and not just discovering it. Although intellectually I understood it I did not feel personally altogether comfortable with this idea. I wanted to tell the stories of entrepreneurs not my own, I wanted to expose them and not myself to the general public. I wanted to be the mediator of understanding, not the creator of it. There are two main reasons why such an attempt is doomed to fail. The first reason deals with the crisis of representation (Denzin 1997, 3, Lincoln – Denzin 2000, 1050-1051). This crisis has arisen because qualitative researchers no longer believe that they can capture lived experience, but the experience is created in the social text written by the researcher.

Secondly, as already pointed out the interviews are not without constraints because of the interview setting – there is an asymmetric interviewing format that remains visible in the one-way issuing of questions (see also Roulston et al 2001, 749) that is partially broken only on a few occasions in a few interviews because the interviewees wanted to have feedback and interaction. In fact, they sometimes ask for my intervention directly in the interviews but more commonly a pause in the narration of an interviewee would create a space for my intervention. Although it may

be possible to conduct interviews merely by turning on the recorder and not giving any cues to the interviewee during the interview, this may result in 'wooden' interviews or uncomfortable situations for both the researcher and the interviewee because participants seek direction from interlocutors as to the nature and topic of talk. (Roulston et al 2001, 768.) Sometimes, however, I was mistaken in my intervention as the pause indicated only a space for thinking about something, reflecting on a particular issue and not a cue for a question on my behalf. There are traces of these in the interviews. Roulston, Baker and Liljestrom (2001) provide an interesting account of how interview talk is co-produced and managed within a socially situated setting. In the article the special emphasis is on the case of complaints: how the researchers create slots for research participants to generate complaints and how they are able to generate specific types of accounts from the respondents, whereas the respondents may also actively resist the researcher's direction. Roulston et al (2001) use the conversation analysis method in their attempt to analyse the researcher's work in generating data. This particular method studies talk-in-interaction and aims to identify and analyse the rules, machinery and structures that constitute orderliness. Thus, the task of the analyst is to analyse the ways in which order is being produced in the interaction. (Psathas 1995.) When transcribing the interviews into texts I was startled with my own involvement in the production of the data. Hence my interest lies more in how the meanings are constructed in the interaction between the participant and myself. I will analyse the meaning construction from the interaction point-of-view (Jokinen 1999, 45): the cues I give the participant to tell her or his story in a particular way, whether it is accepted/rejected or the way I respond to the participant.

Already my presumptions and pre-understanding of the subject direct me towards a particular area and direction. During the first interview I am most drawn to issues centred on the early days of the company, the start up phase. Given that some enterprises were set up in the early 1980s these issues are no longer the closest to the entrepreneur. Rosemary for example wanted to talk about other issues, but during the interview I kept drawing the discussion back to the issues related to the start-up phase (6.1, p. 115). It is only after the interview that I realised this and noticed that it is the 'other' things than the start-up that are the most interesting issues in the story (for example preparing for the retirement by inventing all sorts of activities). In the following interviews I am, thus, more open to the themes the participants want to talk about.

I seem to have had a clear understanding that I was interested in the establishment of the firm, and the related problems and struggles. It is

during my analysis of the stories that it suddenly dawns on me that I am hoping to hear stories of struggles and problems as clearly they make better stories. People reveal more feelings and emotions when talking about problems than when talking about having it easy ‘it is going OK, it is fine, it is nice’. In analysing the interviews I also notice that I find it difficult to accept some of the stories whereas others make sense. For example, Jonathan’s story of setting up his first firm without any immediate need is particularly confusing for me. I do not accept the notion very easily but I ask Jonathan to elaborate on the issue:

Then when you said that you set up the company for some potential [need], without any real...could you think about where the impulse came from? Why did you think that it would be needed?
(My question at Jonathan’s interview after he has repeated many times that the company was set up just in case it would be needed)

I am really baffled with the idea that anybody would want ‘to set up a firm just in case’ that surely there first needs to be the idea before setting up the company. The break in the logical, chronological order (that is in my mind) is broken, and I need to make sense of it, to find the real reason that Jonathan hides.

It should be noted that when we are recounting to others what we are living through and what we are doing, it is constitutive of the experience. Most people have had the experience that they do not really know what they think or mean before they try to communicate it to others. Furthermore, when the telling of a story is met with questions or criticism the story is being organised or reorganised. In a way, on these occasions life can have new meanings that the narrator has not been aware of before. (Carr 1986, 112.) If we take Carr’s ideas and the examples I have given before it seems clear that I am imposing my voice over the participants.

In this study, I have made the decision to talk to the participants only once and I have analysed those stories. The stories are being generated on that occasion for an audience consisting of the entrepreneur, myself and possibly other parties who are not there (for example, business partners, employees, bank managers or other people in the close networks of the entrepreneurs). The stories cover more or less the lifespans of the individuals as entrepreneurs having connections to other identity positions in a compressed format. In the analysis I take these compressed stories as my starting point, these are the stories they have wanted to tell me in the first and only meeting with me, a researcher interested in entrepreneurial stories. In the analysis, however, I am quite insecure about how much I should say based on these interviews. If I am the research instrument in

the analysis am I allowed (or even supposed to) to use my full imagination as well as all the theoretical and practical understanding I have in the analysis in order to generate alternative interpretations of the stories and the events narrated in these stories? How will the entrepreneurs feel when reading these stories that I have authored to be a part of my dissertation? Am I invading their personal space and giving new meanings to their lives that they do not recognise or outright refuse to accept? How will I justify my interpretations?

It is in the writing that I can try to offer the readers the opportunity of exploring the relationship between myself and those being researched as well as the field, 'the context' in trying to convey an understanding of the research and especially of the interviews as social settings that are inhabited by embodied, emotional and physical selves that work to shape, challenge, reproduce our identities (Coffey 1999, 8). I did not try to misunderstand anything although I most certainly have either due to my ignorance of what it is to be an entrepreneur or due to other reasons blocking my view of the world or limiting me to see things in a particular light. Although I can try to empathise or take different views on a particular event or issue I am nevertheless bounded by my own capabilities, thinking and personal background and history.

4.4 Narratives as a method for writing the report

Although many writers informed by Bruner have contradicted narrative knowing with the logo-scientific mode of knowing, in fact boundaries between narrative knowledge and scientific knowledge are artificial, because scientific knowledge can only be represented through narrative knowledge (De Cock 2000). Scientific reports have a narrative structure. The task of the researcher is to tell a good story where the events are its facts, and the point is its theory. A story without a point is meaningless, as are field reports that are not informed by theoretical insight. (Czarniawska-Joerges 1995, Czarniawska 1999, 14-23.) In order to create a believable argument, different presentational strategies, points-of-view and metaphors are applied and selected, which is an example of how the different narrative structures are being weighed and selected. In addition, the presentation of previous academic research and highlighting the deficiencies or gaps could be seen as a way to prepare the audience for the solving of these problems later in the study, and as such to be a specific narrative structure inherent to research reports (Aro 1999, 31-32). There-

fore, all scientific reports are being crafted, they do miraculously appear on paper out of nowhere.

There are, however, writers that take the narrative form of writing scientific reports even more literally. Good storytelling has become the necessary element in writing an interpretative research report. Rich descriptions will unveil the dynamics of the phenomena and will help others to identify similar dynamics in their own research or in their daily lives (Dyer – Wilkins 1991). A good story is somewhat uncertain and open to variant readings (Chia 1995). An important part of narrative is suspense, its unpredictability and the surprises that occur. The ability to create an interesting puzzle is a task for the researcher. The first act must not foretell the third and the second may only suggest it (Czarniawska-Joerges 1995). Realisation that writing is our main activity seems to be growing together with reflection upon how we write; a) what textual devices are used or could be used in writing and b) what are possible criteria for good writing (Chia 1995, Czarniawska 1995).

Realistic studies are often written in a dispassionate third-person voice. The absence of the author is obvious, yet the researcher has the final word on the culture and how it should be interpreted. The realist tale offers one reading and provides fact to support it. The distinguishing characteristics of confessional tales are their highly personalised styles and their self-absorbed mandates. Fieldworkers show their concern for the looseness and open nature of their work. Authors are always close at hand and their writings intend to show how particular works came into being. There is an intimacy shared with readers. The impressionist tales set out to startle the audience with words, metaphors, phrasings, imagery and most critically the expansive recall of the fieldwork experience. They are put together and told in the first person. Narrative rationality is more of a concern than argumentation. The standards are largely those of interest (does it attract?), coherence (does it hang together?), and fidelity (does it seem true?) The main obligation of the impressionist is to keep the audience alert and interested (Van Maanen 1988, Czarniawska-Joerges 1995).

The boundaries of fact and fiction have become increasingly blurred. Social scientists as well as some writers work to develop an understanding of social reality. The alternative discourse practices of narrative fiction allows us to see an object – the subjective experience of life – that can be easily obscured by the more traditional social sciences approach. Combining the texts of this alternative discourse with the traditional texts of theory opens up a new arena of intertextuality allowing the conversa-

tion of the theory to move in new directions and to reveal new aspects. (Van Maanen 1988, Rosen 1991, Phillips 1995.)

The discussion presented shows that after years of following the lead of natural sciences many of the social sciences have found each other. The social sciences took a linguistic turn in the 1970's and 1980's and seem to be taking a literary turn in the 1990's (Watson 1995, Czarniawska 1999). The literary genre has also been criticised as an attempt to convey an impression of self-conscious cleverness. The use of reflexive devices (presenting author) with little attention being paid to the reader retains the naïve belief in the possibility of writing truer texts. An understanding of the text as an element in the author – reader community is the next step to take (Chia 1995). The reader is an agent of the text also. Written texts are created within, and against, particular traditions and audiences. The meaning of a text is always the meaning to someone. (Riessman 1993, 14.)

4.4.1 On the matter of place

“There are no stories out there waiting to be told and no certain truths waiting to be recorded; there are only stories yet to be constructed.” (Denzin 1997, 267)

Qualitative researchers also fail to acknowledge their own participation in the constitution of social reality. The researcher is deemed capable of rendering the truth and writing about it in the qualitative scientific report (Knights 1992). The social scientific researcher is placed in a privileged and pivotal position in the production of knowledge. By prioritising the experience of the professional stranger over that of the native (participants inform whilst researchers interpret) and by theorising parts as micro-cosmos or analogies of the whole, distinctive interpretative strategies are enacted. Interpretative theorising is expressing a culture as subordinate to structure, interpretation is superior to representation and the narrator's voice is prioritised over informants or readers. (Jeffcut 1994.)

Some writers make strong claims that we should be reflexive about our stand in the research whether it is the realist or the subjectivist stand. So far, the researchers with a subjectivist stand have indeed taken a stand and e.g. written themselves as characters in their researcher reports. Mary Jo Hatch's claim is that the position from where one sees (data collection) does not necessarily define the position from where one says (reporting). “*The construction of the narrator in the narrative act mediates the relationship between seeing and saying, and in this way the relation-*

ship between the researcher and the scientific work is constructed from the positions of both seeing and saying.” (Hatch 1996, 367)

In this sense, epistemology and reflexivity are separated into independent spheres although both deal with the constitution of the researcher in relation to his or her work (Hatch 1996, 371). In his commentary on Hatch's essay, van Maanen (1996, 377) explains the non-reflexivity of researchers by the institutionalisation of writing practices within research communities, and suggests that “*authors must find voices and perspectives acceptable to a given community and adopt a rhetorical strategy that allows them to become a part of that community*”. This argumentation seems quite weak as it directs us to protect and maintain ‘status quo’ and does not leave room for experimentation, crossing boundaries and challenging current writing practices. It may be very pragmatic advice for researchers in the climate of ‘publish or perish’ since naturally it will be easier to get published in a given community by adopting the norms of that community but it is no guarantee of good writing and at least not of developing writing skills.

Every piece of writing has an author. Whether this author is visible in the text or not has been the issue of some debate lately. To use the first person approach of the author in a research report is translated as missing authority, objectivity and persuasion. Yet, plain speaking is simply a rhetorical alternative (academic rhetoric) not a turning away from the rhetoric. (Watson 1995.) There is a reasonable requirement that the writer be reflexive about the representations she or he has produced. The illusion of objectivity is no more than an authorial strategy (Brown 2000). Tierney (1999, 308) suggests that writers should make use of this new understanding and really insert themselves in the text and make more extensive use of the narrative range of the authorial voice.

Narrative research opens up the possibility to present many voices to readers but whom do these voices belong to? Our representations are often in competition with the informants themselves. Do we silence them by speaking in their place? Or do we represent them more fully than anybody else (Czarniawska-Joerges 1995)? It is suggested that future interpretative studies will be polyphonic, heteroglossic, multigenre constructions and will include the author's voice and own emotional reactions. The conversations, voices, attitudes, visual genres, gestures, reactions, and concerns of the daily lives of the people with whom the author participates will take form as a narrative and discourse in the text – there will be a story line. The junctures between analytic, fictive, poetic, narrative and critical genres will be marked clearly in the text, but will cohabit the same volume. (Rose 1990, Jeffcut 1994, Czarniawska 1999, 24-25,

Brown 2000.) Albeit appealing suggestions producing an immediate response of ‘this is the way I want to write’ they will inevitably lead to feelings of insecurity and frustration for researchers engaging in this type of research – the researcher must rely on their personal wisdom, skills and creativity to allow room for the different multi-layered accounts that inhabit different voices, and therefore be constantly reflexive about their interpretations: ‘is this enough and is this good enough?’

4.4.2 Presenting the research material

The decision about the way to present my material was a long process. Although in narrative research there are no rules it seems that there are some conventions in the sense that many narrative research reports are written in a way where the research material is presented as stories connected to the individual research participants (Johannisson 1997, Ylijoki 1998, Kurvinen 1999, Katila 2000) although other ways of reporting are found (Vilkko 1997, Kuula 1999). Originally I did not like the idea of presenting the ‘stories of entrepreneurs’ as I thought it would help mystify the individuals as opposed to the themes/issues that might be shared although interpreted differently by the participants, so I was first tempted to discuss the themes in the forefront. However, I felt that there was no escape from the individual nature of these stories being embedded and contextual. I realised that I would have to introduce the entrepreneurs as concrete flesh and blood individuals and at least partially link them to the themes. This created a concern that the research would be uncommunicative, or at least difficult to read and to follow as all the characters in the stories would appear in the various themes and the reader would have to follow very carefully in order to link each entrepreneur to the knowledge created. Since I was not willing to divide the stories into anonymous events that could have happened to just anybody at any time I decided to present the material as individual stories after all.

The way these stories are then narrated in this study varies from one story to another but there are some common elements. I begin all the stories by presenting the scene, I do not call them ‘opening narratives’ as is customary for example in ethnographic research in describing how the researchers entered the field and what kind of relationships were being developed towards the natives (Pratt 1986, 32, Eräsaari 1995, 48) because I find it useful to also talk about the closing scenes; issues discussed or things that happened after turning off the tape-recorder. Nevertheless, it is in these scenes that I aim to anchor the stories to the intense and personal experience of the fieldwork (Pratt 1986, 32). In addition,

my presentations of the scenes are much thinner and shorter than for example Eräsaari (1995) has in her dissertation study where she takes the access to study public sector organisations as an example of the practices within the bureaucracies to refuse access, for example, showing a piece of paper to legitimise access is more acceptable than trying to explain the business in talk (ibid. 15-19). It is in these scenes that I try to make it understandable to the reader how I came across these participants and why I decided to interview them and not other entrepreneurs. It is in these scenes that I try to convey a feeling of being there for the readers and to create a space for the readers to empathise with my anxieties of being late or unprepared, or feeling happy, enthusiastic or amused with the power relations I experienced in these scenes. I also aimed to visualise the scenes and the people in order to create an understanding of the entrepreneurs as flesh and blood people, not just talking heads.

The aim in narrative research to provide rich, real-like and compelling stories sets some boundaries for the number of stories it is possible to present in one study. In her study of entrepreneurs that had gone through bankruptcy and the role of religiousness in the role passage, Lampela-Kivistö interviewed 31 entrepreneurs some of whom she interviewed twice, which resulted in 57 interviews and 1800 pages of transcribed text (Lampela-Kivistö 2000, 69-70). In her study the research results are presented mainly as typologies, for example, she first divides the entrepreneurs in her study to two sub-groups; those who cherish entrepreneurship as the only career alternative and those who have many career alternatives. The only career alternative group is then further divided into 'born entrepreneurs', 'inadaptable' and 'grown entrepreneurs' (Lampela-Kivistö 2000, 69-70). Albeit interesting these typologies also solidify entrepreneurial identities and they cannot be sensitive to the analysis of how these identities or roles are being constructed including the frictions and paradoxes in those stories, which is the aim of my study.

When writing the stories I made it my explicit aim to not try to break the meaning-making structures of the participants but preserve them and let the readers see how the stories are made from the interviews, how the meanings are created. This can be seen from the stories in the temporal notions of 'next', 'later', 'towards the end of the interview' where I aim to give the reader a chance to follow how the story is constructed in time. In the sections where I feel that my question or intervention is important for the construction of the story I include that in the writing of the story. As a result of my choice, the stories of the entrepreneurs that I present here are rather long. Another alternative would have been to exercise a more 'editorial' approach in the writing of the stories by emphasising the

most important events or themes and by erasing the less important ones. My choice is however grounded on the idea that I do not want to create stories that are neat and tidy, stripped of inconsistencies, sidetracks and mundane events and open up to the reader at first reading. I feel that this is particularly important when writing stories of entrepreneurs when the media and biographical literature continues to broadcast these stories that are 'story-like', complete and coherent, reducing the stories to categories of success or failure or emphasising the extraordinary over the mundane (Carr 1986, 79-80).

In this study I have chosen to present all the stories that I collected for the thesis. An interesting question is therefore if had been able to present only half of the stories or to take out one or two would I have reached more or less at the conclusions? I feel that each of these stories introduces something new and relevant; in some cases it is the contents whereas in others it is the way the story is narrated and in some, the way the story is co-constructed in the interview situation. Thus, each of these stories shed light on the issues I focused on in my analysis and hence, I feel that arguably I could not exclude any of them.

4.5 Narratives in entrepreneurship research

According to Bygrave (1989, 7-8) entrepreneurship begins with a disjointed, discontinuous, non-linear and often unique event that cannot be studied successfully with methods designed to study smooth, linear and continuous events. Thus, the phenomenon calls for research methods that are subtle enough to capture the complex, sensitive and highly personal topics. Recently, the necessity to create new non-functionalist theories and understanding of entrepreneurship has also been advocated (Grant – Perren 2002, 202). Therefore, the narrative approach in entrepreneurship research that has so far been quite limited is gathering more and more interest. Some writers consider the role of narrative research as pivotal for the development of entrepreneurship research. In fact, in their epistemological reflections regarding entrepreneurship research Steyart – Bouwen (2000) claim that the attempts to study entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship from a logo-scientific perspective are doomed from the very beginning. This is because they fail to acknowledge the creative and processual nature of entrepreneurship where the researchers are as much creators as representators of the reality they study. In addition, they claim that the universality principle of research needs to be reconsidered, as entrepreneurship is more a multi-perspectivist reality than a one-truth science.

As an alternative it is suggested that a story is a suitable epistemological category for the local and contextualised knowledge entrepreneurship research can aim for. In more practical terms the narrative form of reporting is seen to be accessible to the readers who can easily identify with the characters and partly recognise their own experiences. The narrative allows the experiences of others to be linked to one's own story or to view the latter in a new light (Steyart - Bouwen 2000). I do not advocate narrative research in entrepreneurship to be the only viable methodological solution but I would rather suggest the need to build bridges between the different methodological strands to allow possibilities of translation between discourses and practices of inquiry (Hall J. R. 1999, 259) although there are some interesting ideas developed through narrative research in the field of entrepreneurship. For example, Steyart (1995, 29) studied the organising process of innovative, young high-tech firms aiming to understand how these firms organise their need to remain innovative. The narrative approach is adopted to study the meaning-making processes in the firms. The narrative analysis in the study is pivotal in understanding how the experience, memory, feeling and identity of the firm are being organised in the stories, actualised interactively against others through the development and use of a specific language. (Steyart 1995, 131-145.)

Wåhlin (1999) applied a narrative approach to study the identity development of eight boundary crossing individuals i.e. individuals that change organisations during their professional careers, to investigate the possibilities this type of activity opens up for entrepreneurship. It is argued that individual reflexivity that is being increased through the 'crossings' creates new landscapes for entrepreneurship. Lindgren (2000) studied the differences and similarities of female teachers setting up their own enterprises in the identity building processes. Johansson (1997) has studied how entrepreneurs construct their client identities through narratives. He analyses stories of entrepreneurs and seeks to uncover hidden meanings in their concepts of advising. He sees the stories of entrepreneurs as means of constructing identities of entrepreneurs as clients. In these studies the suitability of narrative research into identity building is being emphasised (See also chapter 3.2.3, p. 40).

Katila (2000) studied how farmers and farming families in general start new businesses on their family farms and how they ensure survival under conditions that threaten to increase economic marginality. Relating my approach Katila's (2000) study could be seen to deal with managing and investigating the co-existence of the different identities; the farmer identity and the entrepreneurial identity.

Drakopoulou Dodd (2002) applied the narrative approach in the study of life narratives depicted from the media to study what kind of meanings entrepreneurs themselves give to entrepreneurship and to being an entrepreneur by analysing the metaphors in the narratives. The shortcoming of her approach that is also well documented in the article is the use of secondary material and, therefore, the material covers mainly success stories that have gone through the editing process of journalists. However, the article opens up the paradox that being an entrepreneur is filled both with considerable pain and considerable pleasure within the entrepreneurial process. This result highlights the potential of narrative research in emphasising tension, friction and paradox.

In the narrative approach, the question whether entrepreneurs are born or made is redundant and the interest lies in the construction and enactment of entrepreneurial identities (Rae 2000, 146). Similarly, trying to elaborate exact and universal definitions for the 'entrepreneur' and 'entrepreneurship' becomes a futile attempt and the aim is to study who the entrepreneurs think they are, and what is the purpose of entrepreneurship in their own eyes (Drakopoulou Dodd 2002, 520). Rae (2000) argues that narrative research into entrepreneurship is a way of creating a 'living theory' of entrepreneurship by looking at how people develop entrepreneurial capability through learning. Furthermore, it is argued that by studying processes through which practising entrepreneurs have developed their attitudes, behaviours and ways of working it is possible to understand better the ways in which individuals learn to act entrepreneurially (Rae – Carswell 2000, 221).

Åkerberg (1999, 2000) discusses the role of narrative in studying entrepreneurs, especially when they move from unemployment to entrepreneurship. She suggests that narratives on at least the following focal points are required to better understand and grasp the phenomenon (Åkerberg 1999, 13-14, Åkerberg 2000, 190): Accounts on the individual's own life-situation that describe individual concerns and the areas of attention of the individuals, accounts that recapitulate critical points in time and space, stories that describe shifts in self-presentation both in specific settings and at specific points in time, accounts that recapitulate descriptions of the environment's reactions to different self-presentations of the new entrepreneurs, stories where gender as such has been meaningful and/or consequential, accounts that portray dominant thought-structures in relation to the actual empirical phenomenon; individually meaningful and consequential stories on unemployment and entrepreneurship, narratives that demonstrate governing stereotypes – considering accounts of success and role models, and how they are perceived to have

affected one's own experiences and stories of individually important and unstable situations interpreted as crisis by the narrator. It is these demands and suggestions that this study aims to respond to.

4.6 Drawing the boundaries of my study

4.6.1 Focusing on entrepreneurs

In this study, the focus is on the entrepreneurs as the prime actors. It must be noted firstly that although I believe that narrative analysis can be, and has been applied, to the study of other social phenomena than entrepreneurship, it is the subject under study, in this case entrepreneurship, that has methodological consequences. For example, the long-term unemployed tell a much grimmer story of redundancy and unemployment (Kortteinen – Tuomikoski 1998, 23-27) than those entrepreneurs I interviewed for this study. I argue that the position from which the persons narrate their life-stories is reflected in the story: the person who is still unemployed needs to tell a story of suffering that starts from the redundancy and unfolds until today as it is not socially acceptable to be unemployed and happy at least in the eyes of the general public. Similarly, the stories of teachers are of a particular kind to the extent that they are strong images that construct our understanding of teachers and also the way teachers need to tell their stories (Syrjälä 2002, 13-14). The focus on entrepreneurs and my interest towards their entrepreneurial life-stories invites particular kinds of stories that are narrated by applying, at least to some extent, the entrepreneurial stereotypes, for example emphasising entrepreneurial freedom, or by rebelling against these stories (see also Syrjälä 2002, 17-18).

The focus on the entrepreneurs, the individuals, naturally has many advantages that have been discussed, e.g. I have been able to overcome the sometimes artificial boundaries of company entry and exit and I have been able to look at particular business activity and entrepreneurship and its development through and after a bankruptcy. This approach also gives me an opportunity to historically examine the emergence of a company from the point-of-view of the entrepreneur. There is, however, at least one problematic issue that this study is not able to look at very profoundly. There were many entrepreneurs who in fact had started their entrepreneurial careers as a part of a team. Since my primary research setting and approach deals with individual stories – and not that of a team – the role and influence of the team, or possibly other influential people in

the entrepreneurship, is pushed to the margin in my study. In my study, I set out to look for the highly individual 'I'-story, and this is also the emphasis in the stories that I get from the entrepreneurs (See also Rae 2000, 157). In some of the stories, the participants narrate parts of their stories from the 'we' position by referring to for example the other partners in the business. However, this issue remains somewhat blurred in the interviews as my focus remains on the individual I-story.

Similarly, I also focus on the lives of the individuals as entrepreneurs and although in most cases other roles and identities are touched upon, this is not always very strongly emphasised. In a sense, I assist in constructing and labelling the individuals in my study as entrepreneurs and this is the stand the entrepreneurs then narrate their stories from. I share an understanding with the participants that they are primarily entrepreneurs in telling their stories which to my surprise in the interviews is contested by the participants adopting other strong positions (for example of a caring wife).

I have already revealed many of my personal deficiencies regarding the study be they due to outright mistakes or errors on my behalf or due to the general conditions that every researcher is bound by. Nevertheless, I feel that something still needs to be said on my role in this study. Being a researcher interested in and enthusiastic about entrepreneurship but lacking first-hand entrepreneurial experience puts me in a certain position. I do not necessarily feel 'in my gut' what it means encountering massive difficulties or succeeding in something where one has devoted all the financial and human resources available. On the other hand, this position has also freed me to question and to be reflexive towards the 'taken for granted' presumptions, mythical truths about entrepreneurship and in general to adopt an unprejudiced approach towards my research material, that has sometimes been difficult for those immersed with the research subject (for example Leskinen 1999, 305, Römer-Paakkanen 2002, 178).

4.6.2 Limitations of narratives

The benefits of narratives and narrative research have been elaborated in this research but in this section I will explore the potential limitations. Firstly, narrative research has been considered as the solution to many of the problems in the more traditional research whether in the field of quantitative or qualitative research by drawing strong boundaries between different types of research or methodologies. We should, however, reframe the problem in non-binary terms in order to try to avoid a dialectic entrapment. By this I refer to John R. Hall (1999, 15):

“Unfortunately, reactions against Reason, against theory, against representation sometimes fit this pattern: they become uncritically infused with the very modes of thought that they reject. It is too easy to reinvent modernist totalization through its destruction, by totalizing relativism via some critique of Reason or essentializing the world as a text.”

Therefore, if I am dismissing functionalist, realistic research on the basis of their totalising strategies I risk falling into the same trap as they have by presenting one strand of research and methodology as the sole alternative. I fear that in this study this risk has been partially materialised but my excuse is grounded on the pragmatic notion of trying to at least say something important although nothing really definitive or conclusive. I have attempted not to fall into excesses; *“to inquiry that is so fragmented that lines of connection have been lost and the social amelioration possibilities of our work have been rendered moot.”* (Smith – Deemer 2000, 894). The relativism as the value stance leads in the direction of endless difference eroding the basis for any communication or production of knowledge, and thus needs to be understood as ‘a conditional relativity’ in order to achieve a socially coherent domain of research (Hall J.R. 1999, 44).

Secondly, it is not the mission of narrative research to capture the totality of the groups way of life, that is I am not aiming to describe the way entrepreneurs live and work, but rather the focus is on the interpreted slices, glimpses and specimens of interaction that display how cultural practices, connected to structural formations and narrative texts, are experienced at a particular time and place by interacting individuals (Denzin 1997, 247). Narratives of entrepreneurs do not provide a better way to locate truth about entrepreneurship. Life stories are amalgams or roles and stories that are not authentic, but co-authored. Narration requires not only a story but also a story-teller. (Carr 1986, 84.) The narrative approach aimed at contextual and embedded knowledge of the research participants limits the application area of the results, but to what extent?

The strong focus taken in this study on the story that is rendered into text puts the focus of the analysis on how people ‘see’ things rather than how they ‘do’ things (Silverman 2000, 832). In this sense narratives are limited by the story-telling capabilities of the participants and their willingness and interest in rendering their lives into stories. This division between ‘seeing and doing’ can be best understood by comparing it to another kind of research method and setting, for example an ethnographic

study where the researcher participates in the everyday life of the entrepreneur and the enterprise making observations of how the entrepreneur acts as an entrepreneur on a day-to-day basis. This type of material would naturally alter my research questions and it would provide another kind of material and knowledge about the participants. In this study, *my focus is on how the entrepreneurs generate knowledge of themselves.*

The more pragmatic limitations of narratives come from the presentation of the material. The method is not suitable for studies of large numbers of nameless, faceless subjects (Riessman 2002). Narrative research should aim at presenting results that are believable and verisimilar (Polkinghorne 1988, 161), that are written as reflexive texts giving the readers the possibility to understand the author, the individual whose story is being told and to reflect back on their own lives (Tierney 2000, 551). This has created a need for the detailed, persuasive and vivid writing of texts. In this study I have bowed to the conventions existing in the field of presenting the stories of entrepreneurs individually in the fear of fragmenting them to pieces that can no longer be attached to certain knowledge and to certain contexts (Riessman 2002). This, however, limits the possibility of presenting the stories of many entrepreneurs and in this study I have limited my investigation to eight entrepreneurs. In realist qualitative research the saturation of the data is the guiding principle for the amount of interviews to be collected. A researcher is advised to continue conducting interviews until no new information is generated in the interviews. (Silverman 2000, 823.) For my study this principle is not relevant as a result of my approach to truth. I do not make any claims of the truthfulness of the personal accounts of the lives of the entrepreneurs I have interviewed, thus having ten entrepreneurs saying the same thing, for example, that they became entrepreneurs because of pure chance does not make this finding any truer. So, the finding that supposedly all entrepreneurs in this study have become entrepreneurs because of chance is not interesting and does not lead to a claim or even suggestion that this might be true to all entrepreneurs in Finland or in the world. My interest lies in the different understandings of 'chance' and how it is being told and constructed by the one, two or eight entrepreneurs who have given this construction in their life-story. Why is this an important issue to discuss in the first place? (Because I have asked them to narrate their life-story as entrepreneurs?) And what are the meanings given to chance? For example, it is constructed as a chance as opposed to intended planned behaviour. So, referring to Bruner this is the power of my research: not aiming for truth but the meaning-making systems of the participants in the study.

As I have underlined previously I rely on the notion of the researcher as the author of the study, thus my approach is heavily dependent on the selections that I make regarding the stories I write and the themes that emerge for me in the interview and in the texts. For example, in this study I claim to have become sensitive to the gender discussion in the interviews. I do not claim that this is something that every reader or listener would be sensitive to if facing similar interview situations or if listening to my tapes or reading the transcripts but I could argue that someone might. Similarly, some other themes have been ignored or downplayed by my authorial choices in writing the narratives.

4.7 Rethinking the questions of validity, reliability and generalisability

The traditional criteria – questions of validity, generalisability and reliability - for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research have been challenged with the crisis of legitimisation.

“The question from this crisis is, “How are qualitative studies to be evaluated in the contemporary, poststructural moment?” (Denzin 1997, 4)

Denzin (1997, 7-9) identifies four different responses to this crisis. Firstly, there are positivists who make no difference between quantitative and qualitative research and they apply the standard criteria to disciplined inquiry (internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity). Secondly, post-positivists call for the development of unique criteria to qualitative research but no agreement on the criteria has been reached. The third approach, which he names post-modernism, contends that the very idea of assessing qualitative research is antithetical to the nature of research and the world it attempts to study.

“For post-modernism, ethnographic practices are ways of acting in the world. These ways of acting (interviewing and observing) produce particular, situated understandings. The validity, or authority of a give observation is determined by the nature of the critical understandings it produces.” (p. 8).

The fourth position, critical poststructuralism calls for a construction of an entirely new set of criteria, different from any of the above. Such

criteria would stress subjectivity, emotionality, feeling and so forth. (Denzin 1997, 7-9.)

In one doctoral seminar, not very far into my research, I proudly presented what I was about to do – that I was into narrative research due to its capability of seeking ‘verisimilitude’ because I thought that as researchers we needed to make the entrepreneurial experience more ‘life-like, believable and possible’ (Ellis – Bochner 2000, 751). After my presentation my discussant made the following remark (question?) ‘It may be that the method is driving the research project and it does not stem from the research question’. Another professor supportive of the discussant commented that ‘the word – verisimilitude – I cannot even pronounce it’. These remarks or questions demonstrated that the relevance and place of narrative research needs to be clarified. So, how can I say that this research project is valid? This study relies on the following ideas; language is not a transparent medium – it cannot reflect reality. A story of one’s past is different from the past itself. The story is always partial, incomplete and selective. Thus, I do not aim to generalise in the traditional sense but to give readers my experience of entrepreneurs and then it is for the readers to judge whether my text communicates; whether entrepreneurs can relate to this text (does it speak?) and whether entrepreneurship researchers or other people think it speaks of the entrepreneurs they know, or, whether it tells a story of people they do not know but still seem believable. (Ellis – Bochner 2000, 751.)

This peculiarity – research that is not searching for the truth and therefore is incapable of distinguishing between fact and fiction – naturally creates concern among the research community that is not familiar with the narrative approach. There is a need to develop and come to terms with new criteria for ‘goodness’ in research (Tierney 1999, 311). However, according to Bruner (1986, 1990) the narrative is able to provide intelligible explanations out of unexpected events or people’s non-scientific explanations and interpretations of their own life. Thus, the perceived coherence of the temporal order of events – narrative coherence - rather than the falsity or truth of the story elements determines the plot and the power of the narrative as a story. This requires stories being told in a way that the earlier stories are in relation to new stories in meaningful ways. (Czarniawska, 1998, 5-6, Heikkinen, 2001, 197.) As an alternative to the standard of truth to judge inquiry I will rely to another criterion, namely whether it “*opens up new things to think about*” (Hall, J. R. 1999, 20).

5. BUILDING BLOCKS FOR THE STORIES

This chapter serves to introduce the participants in the study in more detail as well as the logic in choosing them, the devices and the ways the participants used to tell their stories and some of the important themes that were introduced as part of the identity stories.

5.1 Choosing and locating entrepreneurs for the study

Especially in the American literature there is a clear distinction between small business owners and entrepreneurs. 'True entrepreneurs' are seen to be those who capitalise on innovative combinations of resources for the purpose of profit and growth whereas small business owners run more or less stable enterprises to further personal goals and to produce family income (Carland et al 1984, 354-359, Stewart et al 1999, 191). In Finland the distinction is less so. The Finnish term 'yrittäjä' covers both concepts. If one wants to use the term 'yrittäjä' in the American sense of the 'entrepreneur' it normally needs to be qualified with some kind of an explanation. From the American point-of-view my study covers both entrepreneurs and small business owners but following the Finnish tradition I will call them all entrepreneurs.

Locating and choosing entrepreneurs in this study is based on the following principles. Firstly, I looked for entrepreneurs with an academic degree or equivalent but I excluded medical doctors, lawyers and other representatives of 'strong' professions from my study based on an assumption that e.g. medical doctors have a strong identity based on their profession, and would not necessarily consider themselves entrepreneurs although they had a private practice. This could, however, be something worth investigating in another study. Since entrepreneurship is currently highly valued in Finland, and there has been a lot of discussion of entrepreneurship it may be that even medical doctors and other professions have come to see themselves as entrepreneurs. In a way this supports my view that the categories and labels are not stable but constantly negotiated. At least marketing and advertising in the area of, for example, plastic surgeries have changed dramatically over the past few years. In addition, there is an increasing interest in studying the two dimensional roles of medical doctors as both doctors and business people, and some interesting research has been published in the field (e.g. Llewellyn 2001).

However, my choice was grounded on the reasoning that for medical doctors the business idea is self-evident and the barrier for entering into a private practice is relatively low. It is also fairly normal to be working both in private practice and in a state-owned clinic simultaneously and hence doctors are not forced to make a decision in favour of either of the two roles or identities.

The study is heavily based on the narrative method and, hence, on the capability of the interviewees to narrate verbally their experiences, thoughts and motives. This is the very pragmatic reason for selecting mainly academic entrepreneurs in the study. This could also be seen as a major weakness in all of the studies that rely on the narrative capabilities of their focus group to be more or less dependent on the ability of the interviewees to verbalise their thoughts and meaningmaking systems and structures. In a narrative study it could be seen to be a major problem if the participants answer with very short 'yes and no' type of answers (See 4.2.3, p. 62).

The choice of academic or well-educated entrepreneurs in the study stems from a career possibility perspective. People with an academic degree do have a wider range of opportunities open to them, making the alternative and the related choices more visible. For example, for a qualified hairdresser the choices are limited (if assuming that she or he wants to stay within that field of work): to work as an employee, to rent a chair in a salon or to become an entrepreneur by setting up or buying a salon. Again, as with medical doctors this could be an area worth studying – it could be that some hairdressers understand their business is offering haircuts whereas some have, in fact, developed their business into an experience business where the haircut is only a small part of the business idea. However, for the scope of this study I have limited my approach to academic or well-educated entrepreneurs and to cases where I have assumed that the entrepreneurial career has been only one of the many opportunities for those individuals and, hence, it could be seen that the identity work is facilitated and even accelerated.

In Arthur's story an insight in this line is given (6.7, p. 236). His first career choice was to train himself to be a metalshop worker and he works as one after graduation. This is followed by a long period that he spends gradually increasing his education. However, his concurrent choices were limited due to his initial choice as he had to follow the technical studies programme and to become an engineer despite his interest in other careers. In a way, Arthur's story supports my initial reasoning – those with a university degree do share a wider range of opportunities than those who take for example a basic vocational degree. The most interesting

idea with regard to the facilitated identity work is, however, Arthur's construction of the opening of new windows through his incremental process of education. In this way, through education his opportunities gradually widened.

Secondly, I looked for entrepreneurs with different backgrounds and stories to tell. I discussed the issue on several occasions with my supervisor to use our mutual preunderstanding to map out a number of different routes to entrepreneurship or in general the different ideas of what kind of entrepreneurs there are at the moment. I did not want to emphasise the stereotypes of entrepreneurs so this also directed my choice of participants to also include entrepreneurs who are not the obvious choices for a study on entrepreneurs, i.e. to include also entrepreneurs not frequently in the press and other media, or those actively involved in enterprise associations. As routes to entrepreneurship I was interested in people coming out of unemployment, directly from university or working as an employee. Since high-tech entrepreneurs were much debated at the end of 1990s I wanted to include representatives in this study to represent 'the new wave' of entrepreneurs. Although most Finnish entrepreneurs are currently middle-aged (see for example Stenholm 2002) I also wanted to have entrepreneurs representing the younger generation in the study. Furthermore, although women represent only 30% of entrepreneurs I included four men and four women in this study in order to propagate and to support the image of a world where women and men could participate equally in entrepreneurial ventures. Discussing only male entrepreneurs or taking just one female entrepreneur as the 'deviant' case would help to reproduce female entrepreneurs as a marginalised group of entrepreneurs. In general when selecting the participants for my study the guiding principle was to include as much heterogeneity in my material as possible.

In addition, in the course of the interviewing I had at least two other ideas for potential participants but could not locate them at the time. I was interested in a person who had left the public sector to become an entrepreneur and a former entrepreneur who had returned to wage work, as an employee. If I had been interested in just any representatives of these categories it would naturally have been fairly easy to locate these participants, but my other criteria limited the choice. On the other hand, I am sure that there are other 'cases' or interesting stories missing from this study.

I did not personally know any of the entrepreneurs but I applied various methods in locating them. Although the following list seems incidental much effort and thought was put into locating 'good informants'.

- a) My supervisor suggested two of the entrepreneurs (Rosemary and Diane). She had met the two women and knew something of their stories as entrepreneurs and suggested them for my study.
- b) One of the entrepreneurs (Rosemary) suggested I should interview her 'mentee', Eliza, for the study.
- c) A colleague of mine suggested that I could interview her former colleague, Jonathan, and another colleague proposed that I interview his former university student friend (Timothy).
- d) One of the entrepreneurs, Marge, participated in another study in the Small Business Institute (Lehto – Stenholm 2001).
- e) I heard one of the entrepreneurs (Arthur) give a seminar speech of his story as an entrepreneur and followed that up.
- f) The eighth entrepreneur (Samuel) was suggested to me by another professor in response to my request to find someone with a university / research background.

The industry was not a key concern when selecting the interviewees but in the end it turned out that the majority of the interviewees represented services, which could be expected given the choice of academic or otherwise well-educated entrepreneurs.

All of the entrepreneurs I approached agreed to participate in the study. This could also be an interesting topic that could be a point of analysis. Since my background is in organisations and administration I have attended several research seminars in the field of organisation research where the issue of access has been frequently presented as at least a minor problem. Based on my personal experience as a researcher who has contacted mainly entrepreneurs and owner-managers of small companies, access has never been a problem. Entrepreneurs seldom refuse to participate in a telephone or personal interview although their rate of response to surveys is often quite low.

In the next table listing basic information regarding the entrepreneurs and their companies is presented (Table 2). The stories of all the entrepreneurs are presented individually in the next chapter (6, p. 115).

Table 2 Presenting the entrepreneurs and their enterprises in the study

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Professional back-ground</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>Year (estab-lishment)</i>	<i>Sector</i>	<i>Employ-ees</i>
Rosemary	Late 50s	Industry related experience	B.Sc. (Eng.)	Textile industry	1982	Industry	7
Jonathan	43	Teacher, project manager	M.Sc. (Philosophy)	Translation office	1988/1993	Service	20-30
Eliza	37	Designer, entrepreneur	Studies (University of Arts and Design)	Textile designs	1988/1998	Service	1
Diane	Late 40s	Experience in marketing	B.Sc. (Commerce)	Training, consulting services	1995	Service	1
Marge	43	Journalist	M.Sc. (Journalism)	B-to-B services	2000	Service	1
Timothy	33	University student (some working experience)	M.Sc. (Econ. &Bus. Adm.)	Software company	1995	Service	7
Arthur	56	CEO, Industry related experience	M.Sc. (Eng.)	Training and engineering	1985/1992	Service	10
Samuel	Late 30s	Business & university back-ground	PhD (Biochemistry)	Biotechnology company	1995	Industry	56

5.2 Story formats and ways of narrating

5.2.1 Different stories, not just different themes

For this study I conducted eight interviews. My analysis of the contents will demonstrate the similarities and differences across the interviews (5.3, p. 100) and the same holds true for the story formats and ways of narrating. Prior to the interviews I assumed I would hear a standard format for the stories and by this I mean that the entrepreneurs would engage in the storytelling mode, tell me interesting, surprising, funny and sad stories from their experiences as entrepreneurs. I was prepared to listen to the (analytical) survival and success stories where, first, the entrepreneur bangs his or her head against the wall when searching for finance and trying to make the first deal, i.e. the early years of the company are filled with problems and struggles that the entrepreneur needs to overcome in order to make it. These stories would then include lucky coincidences that bring in new customers or other vivid, memorable moments that make the early struggles worthwhile and finally climaxing with the prosperity and the success the entrepreneur is encountering at the moment of telling the story. Although I was expecting heterogeneity within the stories, i.e. different themes, I was surprised about the heterogeneity in the story telling formats and therefore it became a focus in my analysis. Why is it important for some to tell a coherent story spiced with some tragic and dramatic elements, whereas some refused my open invitation to provide such a story? Does it have something to do with age – is the older generation of entrepreneurs more tempted to tell the grand stories of their lives, and is the younger generation more inclined to refuse the grand story, being more ego-centric, focusing on the individuality and intimacy of their experiences, and hence, the telling of the stories becomes an impossibility? Has the younger generation indeed been exposed to the fragmentation of their lives and the society that makes the grand story ‘the Story of My Life’ a pure impossibility? Or whether the time lag, together with the act of telling the story to different audiences are needed to transform the entrepreneurial stories into the arch-like stories?

The great, arch-like, crystallised story is available for example in the story of Rosemary (6.1, p. 115) while others engage in a more fragmented story telling. The story of Jonathan falls into this category (6.2, p. 139). The fragmented story is not readily digestible and at first I find it difficult to follow. In the beginning of the interview I feel anxious ‘I’m never going to keep the interview going for even an hour’ but in the end that is one of the longest interviews as the story begins to unwind during

the interview. It is the stories of Timothy and Samuel I find the most confusing. Timothy refuses to engage in telling his story (6.6, p. 217); he does not want to emphasise any particular events to be more meaningful than others in the fear of giving a false picture of the true meaning of entrepreneurship for him. On the other hand, he is utterly concerned about whether I 'get anything out' of the interview demonstrating Timothy's wish to accommodate my intellectual needs and to give a full and detailed picture of his entrepreneurship, which he finds difficult because it is 'just life', void of extraordinary events or particularities linked to entrepreneurship as opposed to any other type of work.

Despite the visible asymmetry of interviews (I am asking far more questions than the participant and participants are telling more about themselves than I am about myself, see also for example Roulston et al 2001) the interviews are also more or less interactive settings where the researcher and the participant engage in a dynamic relationship. In the interviews it is also possible to see traces of the way I help the participants to construct their stories. For example, in the case of Samuel (6.8, p. 256) I am surprised and perplexed firstly that he does not tell his story voluntarily but expects my intervention and secondly that he is not telling of his personal experiences but more of the general difficulties attached to the industry or entrepreneurship. The need for my interventions in constructing the story results in me offering him themes like growth and the problems related with personnel and growth and the role of the entrepreneur to tell the story. In addition, my role and interventions are in any case visible through the letter I sent prior to the interviews. Marge's story is a reflective account that is structured around my request (6.5, p. 202). She even makes comments like 'with regard to identity', making use of my vocabulary and concepts in narrating her story.

There are however also other elements that are applied in the stories. Eliza's story is structured very much against prevailing myths, common knowledge and research about entrepreneurship (6.3, p. 160). She uses them frequently in her narrative. Since Rosemary is Eliza's mentor it was interesting to notice some common elements in the two stories.

Now I can decide on the risks myself and... how I solve them. And if I mess it up - I have done some really stupid things anyway. But I have always learned from them. That okay, well it is me who will be paying for them then. (Eliza)

When I bear the responsibility myself for it, nobody will, will come to say if I make some really stupid investments. It's quite lovely. To be able to sometimes very quickly make a, a decision and not necessarily know if it is so wise. (Rosemary)

In Diane's story the voices of female entrepreneurs come through her narrative (6.4, p. 182). Arthur's story is an analytical and reflexive account, which contains a lot of anecdotes about himself ('accidental engineer') and where the major incident structures the whole story (6.7, p. 236).

5.2.2 Devices for constructing the stories

The participants apply various elements, devices, to construct their stories. Similar to the study of Cunliffe (2001, 363) they refer to archetypes and images of who to be or not to be to construct their entrepreneurial identity. For example, Timothy refuses the archetypal image presented, for example, in the media of an IT entrepreneur aiming solely at profits and getting rich as his personal identity but constructs a new identity of an entrepreneur interested in providing good quality services to the customers but the new identity is constructed through using the archetype (6.6, p. 217).

It is also in Timothy's story where he applies examples of the research work to parallel our experiences to connect and share mutual experiences. Stories offer one way of connecting; of trying to grasp what is happening and impacting others through emotional pull (Cunliffe 2001, 365). It seems that fictional but concrete stories offer important possibilities for the participants to convey the most difficult experiences and to involve me personally and emotionally in their experiences. Arthur describes his feeling of losing control in the bankruptcy by telling a fictional story of a car hurrying down a winding route out of control (p. 242). Marge expresses her feelings of the redundancy by giving an example of getting a hot stone in her head (p. 206). Through framing the experiences into these concrete, quite physical stories it is possible to personally feel what those experiences felt like for the participants rather than the more abstract events that actually took place. These fictional stories serve also as metaphors, which turned out to have an important meaning in the way the participants were weaving the stories. Thus, metaphors are applied to 'make visible' the imaginary and the power of metaphor is that it can create images and enable understanding. However, similar to the argument presented in this study that talk does not represent experience, metaphor does not have direct access to that experience nor can it create a clear picture or image that can be used as a starting point for coherent analysis (metaphors are not self-explanatory); it is only through the combination of the object of the study and the metaphor, the

principal subject and the modifier that a meaningful picture is constructed. (Alvesson 1993, 114-115.)

“A metaphor is created when a term is carried over from one system or level of meaning to another, thereby illuminating some central aspects of the latter (and shadowing other aspects). A metaphor allows an object to be perceived and understood from the viewpoint of another object.” (Alvesson 1993, 116)

Humour and laughter were also present in most of the interviews to varying degrees. There are different ways of analysing and understanding the humour taking place in the interviews. I seem to be laughing a lot although the points where I laugh are not particularly humorous in fact I seem to be laughing when posing most of my questions. The function of humour is, therefore, easy to pinpoint to address my anxiety in making intelligible questions, of probing the lives of the people I am meeting for the first time, of asking sometimes very personal questions about family life and their life decisions. As a researcher, a doctoral student I was wearing the hat that gave me permission to make these queries, however, I was not altogether comfortable with my role as the intruder of personal privacy and at the same time I enjoyed the interviews a lot, especially afterwards.

In addition, most participants applied some sort of humour in their stories. Sooner or later in the interview – and in most cases on more than one occasion – all the interviewees laughed or made a humorous comment or applied a humorous tone. The role of those could be understood to be to ease the tension in the interviews and to make some of the serious or personal stories less serious and less touching. Or laughter is the mode of telling the story not part of its content. The ‘laugh about it later’ presents an event that was not funny to the tellers at the time, but becomes funny in its re-telling. It can be told without the typical joke format (without a punch line) because it tells about a particular event – an embarrassing event – that is socially recognised as funny. This type of humour might be a way of coping with the pain linked to the embarrassment. It is to be noted also that the stories transform the pain from the past to the pleasure of the today recruiting the audience to this process to give validity through laughter to the transformation. (Billig 2001, 37-38.)

I share an understanding of the role of irony in pointing towards a contradiction in the stories. For example, for Timothy, who frequently uses irony it seems that the getting rich is the contradiction in his entrepreneurial life. On one hand, it is what is being taught in the business school where the focus is on emphasising the profit making capability of the or-

ganisations and, on the other, this is the norm in the IT industry. The fact that Timothy is refusing this ideal and norm at least partially is made visible through the frequent use of irony.

In the stories the participants apply many examples to substantiate the claims they have made. Often these examples deal with their own experiences but sometimes they try to reach me and to make sure that I understand their experiences by inventing examples that deal with academic life and of conducting research. In addition, examples of other people are offered to substantiate the claims and personal experiences. It is as if the participants are applying ‘triangulation of evidence’ to convince me of the truthfulness of their experiences. Sometimes numeric frequencies are also provided to support the universality and generalisability of the evidence provided, for example, Eliza tells about having worked in two different family businesses with the same problems in order to provide convincing evidence that the problems experienced may be extended to cover all the family companies (p. 165). Similarly, lists are provided to offer evidence for the information given.

5.3 Contents of the entrepreneurial stories

In the interviews some themes are developed into more important ones in that they are shared themes in the stories of several participants in the study or that a theme is an overriding one in the story of one participant. This was the principle for selecting the themes to be presented here although the stories would have allowed discussion of other themes as well. For example, I have decided not to discuss the issue of growth here although it was touched upon in the stories but it did not become a major theme in any of the stories. Here I will discuss the contextually and contemporarily relevant themes that emerged from the stories of the entrepreneurs in the study. It is these themes that form the ‘what’ of the entrepreneurial stories in the study.

5.3.1 Opportunities and escapes

5.3.1.1 Recognising opportunities

There is an increasing understanding of the need to study the entrepreneurial process through opportunity recognition and exploitation of the opportunities. It is argued that it is the individuals and opportunities that are the first-order forces explaining entrepreneurship rather than envi-

ronmental forces and their impact (Shane – Venkatamaran 2002, 14). My study offers me an opportunity to study how the participants talk about the opportunities that they have exploited in their entrepreneurial careers. It is interesting how the participants frequently framed these opportunities to have been pure chances, some sort of miracles that took place. For example, in the story of Jonathan (6.2, p. 139) he plays with different ideas and makes concrete attempts to acquire financing in order to realise them. However, the opportunity, which emerges and is pursued, is interpreted to result from pure chance. The meanings of chance, therefore, seem to be dealing with outcomes that were not directly sought after but opportunities that emerge accidentally and then are exploited by the participants. The image that unfolds is that there are entrepreneurial opportunities about but it is difficult for the nascent entrepreneurs to really put their finger on them but rather the entrepreneurs start playing with the idea or some ideas– ‘what if I went into the business’ (Steyart 1995) – and they start looking for an angle and in the case of these successful entrepreneurs (here meaning the ones who actually entered the business) something happens that provides an opportunity, which then is interpreted as chance. In some cases the original business idea that was the basis for setting up the company is never realised but chance presents a new business idea, which is pursued (see Diane’s story 6.4, p. 182). Or the idea is given a further push through a chance that emerges – an order or an assignment that gives the new business a new direction, as in the case of Arthur, the success he experiences in his consulting activities is framed to be a chance that gives prominence to his chosen business field. In the case of Marge during the entrepreneurship training course the long-term freelance contract she secures assures her that there will be new assignments like it in the future convincing her of the viability of the opportunity.

It seems that seeking of opportunities and discovering them work simultaneously in the stories of entrepreneurs. While playing with the ideas they are exposed to the opportunities and may also be prepared for chances to emerge. Thus, it seems a future-oriented persistence and trust is needed in the entrepreneurial process regarding the opportunities that are difficult to identify. Elsewhere it is also suggested that entrepreneurs who offer stable and internal explanations, such as ‘I’ve always wanted to own my own business’, for their plans of getting into business are also likely to get into the business and generate sales (Gatewood et al 1995). Furthermore, it is also presented that those nascent entrepreneurs who are aggressive in making their business real and tangible to others, in other words those individuals who are acting as if the business is al-

ready there, succeed in setting up the company (Gartner et al 1992, Carter et al 1996).

This study, however, clearly suggests that while acknowledging that opportunity plays an important part in entrepreneurship it casts doubt on the existence of objectively available or perceived opportunities (see also Ahl 2002, 44). Rather, there is an active meaning-making process taking place in order to make sense of the opportunities and the reasons that made the entrepreneurs pursue these opportunities and not some others in the beginning of their entrepreneurial careers.

5.3.1.2 Escaping organisational life

Traditionally, there have been studies both in the field of entrepreneurship and career theories where the push and pull dichotomy has been utilised when analysing why people take the decision to become an entrepreneur or change jobs, i.e. what factors are pushing or pulling individuals to make these decisions and moves (Mallon – Cohen 2001, 218). This dichotomy if taken as an either or question can be seen to be reductionist and stereotypical resulting in understandings that do not account for the relationship between pull and push, or more generally the complexity of factors at work. However, it seems that the push factor, the dissatisfaction and disillusionment within the organisation the entrepreneurs have previously worked for is an important trigger in the entrepreneurial process. In some cases it may even be that the decision to go into self-employment is seen to be the only alternative to resolve the situation that results from problems of working in an organisation (Mallon – Cohen 2001, 222). In addition, in their study of the career barriers of older female managers, Still and Timms (1998, 149) discovered that many of the women were growing tired of the gender-political game that career advancements necessitated and were looking for ways of ‘opting out’ through starting their own businesses to escape the working environment.

In my study, the negative aspects with regard to working life and organisations have been meaningful triggers for the entrepreneurs to pursue their entrepreneurial career. This becomes especially vivid in the story of Marge but it is reflected also to some extent and with varying degrees in most of the other stories. In the story of Jonathan the attractiveness of the entrepreneurial life is constructed against the horrors of working in the university or the school context. Timothy, although entering business from the university, identifies the large corporations as stiff and hierarchical organisations, thus, framing his entrepreneurial career decision to

be a positive one against the negatively interpreted career possibilities within a large company.

5.3.2 Trends of working life

5.3.2.1 Ending the era of contracts for life

Insecurity and risk are seen to characterise the contemporary experience of work, leaving individuals responsible for the construction of their position in the labour market. Careers have traditionally provided a set of organising principles around which managers and professional employees in organisations have been able to structure both their professional and private lives. There has been a ‘psychological contract’ between the employer and employee based upon loyalty and commitment to the organisation in exchange for the incremental increases in authority, status, and financial remuneration. The combined promise of job security and advancement has constituted the major reward for the middle-class career. (Wajcman – Martin 2001, 559-560.) This is no longer the case in current day organisations as a dramatic change has taken place in work life. Employee loyalty and commitment are still the expected norm in organisations, but this does not result in a secure job. The value of each employee is constantly weighed against the costs and large corporations in particular will often use staff cuts as their first option to meet the profitability demands of the investors and shareholders. It has become common practice that dismissals are accepted not only to cut losses but also to increase the profitability of a company. This change in work life can be seen in the stories told by the participants in this study.

More importantly, however, these changes taking place in work life are also transforming the constructions and understanding of entrepreneurial life. From a positive point-of-view the changes have been suggested to enhance the emergence of a new ‘boundaryless career’ or ‘portfolio career’ where individuals accumulate skill and personal reputation as key career resources by frequent movements between firms and in and out of self-employment and job opportunities that extend over a single employment setting. The focus is no longer on the positions but on the skills of an individual to be hired to accomplish specific tasks. (Mallon 1998, 361, Templer – Cawsey 1999, 72, Sullivan 1999, 458.) The once risky choice of becoming an entrepreneur has now become a less risky option since at least as an entrepreneur one has the opportunity of making decisions oneself and not being dependent on some decisions made at a headquarters tens of thousands of kilometres away. Thus, entrepreneur-

ship as a career is becoming a more secure alternative with the developments and increasing insecurity and risk in work life. However, these normatively positive assumptions of portfolio careers have also been contested with the suggestions that individuals are pushed towards portfolio careers either through redundancy or unemployment or through varying levels of unhappiness and bitterness about organisational restructuring, new management, broken promises and lost promotion hopes (Mallon 1998, 367). Given the choice of a rewarding long-term organisational career it is still an option preferred by for example most managers (Wacjman – Martin 2001).

On the other hand, there are also some research results suggesting that those who were reluctantly pushed to self-employment are subsequently disinclined to return to employment. This could be understood in a way that the rewards of entrepreneurial life are uncovered only through acting as one especially if the person mirrors the entrepreneurial experiences against the unrewarding moments spent in an employment relationship in an organisation (Mallon 1998, 373-374). This reasoning echoes in Marge's story (6.5, p. 202).

Through the restructuring of working life and organisational careers the language of careers is also changing. The understanding of careers being a rising up through an organisational hierarchy is replaced with an articulation of a more fluid career (Mallon 1998, 364), as in the case of Diane in this study (6.4, p. 182). She makes use of the new career talk by referring to her unemployment as a sabbatical, a needed break in her career. The new career also suggests that the career could be understood not through upward movement of gaining power, status and influence but as a vehicle for the realisation of self (Adamson 1997, 245-246).

5.3.2.2 The 'problem' of ageing

While the overall population is currently ageing it is still under discussion if it should be considered to be a problem in the labour market. Firstly, the big issue is the need to find substitutes in the coming years both as employees but also increasingly to take over the enterprises where the entrepreneurs are increasingly transferring to retirement (See also Rosemary's story 6.1, p. 115 and chapter on business transfer issues 5.3.7.2, p. 112). Ageing is also a 'problem' in another sense since the ageing workers are considered to be a burden in the workplaces due to their outdated skills, attitudes or competencies and their assumed incapability of developing new skills or competencies. This has resulted in age discrimination in the labour market with findings suggesting that people

over 45 are finding it difficult to find a new job, older people are more easily dismissed than younger people or directed into early retirement, and hence, the degree of people over 55 in the labour market is steeply declining. (e.g. Yearata – Warr 1995, Arrowsmith – McGodrick 1997, Taylor – Walker 1997.)

Ageing is developed as a theme in various stories presented here but from different angles. In Marge's story it is presented as a source of personally experienced discrimination (6.5, p. 202). As a woman over forty in the labour market she feels that she is no longer employable. In the case of Arthur (6.7, p. 236) ageing is applied as a resource in building the entrepreneurial future where it is given both as an explanation for the potential reduction of capabilities and at the same time ageing is also described as a positive phenomenon with the expertise and fuller holistic understanding that it brings along. In Jonathan's story (6.2, p. 139), ageing is understood to set him a new life goal and mission as at the age of 50 a man is supposed to start educating youth, i.e. start transferring knowledge. Thus, this study casts light on the different interpretations of ageing, making it possible for the participants in this study to interpret ageing positively from the point of view of their careers.

5.3.3 Entrepreneurial values: Freedom and responsibility

While the contextual situation in most stories is depicted to have had a strong impact on their entrepreneurial career, the entrepreneurs also provide person-centred or trait explanations for entrepreneurship or successes they have encountered as entrepreneurs, e.g. responsibility, hard-working, non-conformity to authority (Olsson 2002) that I have chosen here to label as entrepreneurial values. The feeling of being responsible for oneself and one's own actions is an important source of satisfaction and pride to the entrepreneurs in this study. In some cases it is possible to link this together with the problems experienced in organisational life and the feelings of losing all control regarding one's own work, which is regained through entrepreneurship (Mallon – Cohen 2001, 227).

Freedom is the most commonly interpreted advantage to entrepreneurship. Although Arthur labels it as illusionary freedom since he feels he is bound by his customers, it is, however, an important aspect in his entrepreneurship, to be able to make the decision himself of accepting to participate in a research interview and not to be told to do so by a superior. Thus, I understand responsibility and freedom to be the opposite sides of the same coin; freedom is constrained by the responsibilities but on the

other hand, to have and take the responsibility generates the feelings of freedom.

Within the feelings of responsibility it is possible to identify another source of value that the entrepreneurs were putting forward in their story: As employers in small businesses the entrepreneurs shared a feeling of responsibility for their employees. The decisions in the companies are not made on solely economic and financial grounds or to suit just the needs and preferences of the entrepreneur but the decisions are weighed against the possible outcomes for the employees, whatever is done is most often aimed at securing employment for the employees. This may also be reflected against the economic situation the 1990s' in Finland; job opportunities were extremely limited due to the recession and even after the otherwise booming turn of the century the unemployment rate remained high (around 10-12%). Therefore, it is not to be taken for granted that the employees would find new jobs and therefore, the decisions are constructed against the consequences for employees. In the case of Arthur, paradoxically, the decision to declare bankruptcy was partially influenced by his feeling of responsibility for his employees; in this way they could avoid 'unnecessary cruelty' towards employees. In Rosemary's story, the role of employees and concern for their destinies is emphasised when encountering family problems and not finding motivation to work in the business.

5.3.4 Gender matters and family too

The issue of gender was something that I originally thought of ignoring albeit there is growing interest towards gender in entrepreneurship (see e.g. the special issue edited by Carter – Weeks 2002). Although I was not listening attentively to the gendered talk in my interviews it soon became so loud that I did not want to overlook it. For the three female entrepreneurs with families (Rosemary, Diane, Marge) the story of being an entrepreneur is articulated with the story of being a mother or a spouse (see also Lindgren 2000, 127, Wåhlin 1999, 130-131). The one is not without the other. Choices are justified against particular situations in the family. 'I could start up the company then because my children were already grown-ups' or '... the decision of becoming an entrepreneur was not so difficult because I do not have children or anyone depending on me'. This type of career talk is of course not only limited to entrepreneurs but it seems that women routinely place their career stories in the context of their partners and children and talk about managing home/work responsi-

bilities when telling their work histories (Halford et al 1997, 192, Gerson 2002, 8).

In international studies the need for women to work flexible hours and to balance between work and family has been identified as the main motivator for women to pursue entrepreneurship (McKay 2001, Orhan - Scott 2001). However, in Finland the reasoning seems to be the opposite – entrepreneurship is more time-consuming than ‘normal paid work’, and hence it can only be done if the family does not pose too many demands on the female. This difference may be explained by the fact that in Finland the working mother is the norm, and hence staying at home with the children is the exception. The flexible combinations of employment and daycare (such as choosing employment where it is possible to take the child or working during the hours the children are asleep) are made impossible by the normalisation of female employment but daycare is organised by separating the work and care. (Julkunen 1995, 88-95.)

In addition, the three women (Diane, Rosemary and Marge) in my study bring the support or lack of support of the spouse into the discussion as an issue. In a way they seem to be answering the questions ‘What did your husband think of it?’ or ‘How has your family reacted to your actions?’ although I have not asked these questions explicitly in the interview. On the other hand, my interest in ‘the important people for entrepreneurship’ is included in the introductory letter, and introducing the family/companions can, therefore, be translated as a reply to this area. It is made visible by the invisibility of families in the male entrepreneurs’ stories.

Meriläinen (2000) analyses what are the discursive possibilities available to Finnish female bank managers when they talk about combining work and a career with family life. In the study two main discourses are identified – that of equality and of difference. The bank managers were partly producing an image of an independent and equal individual who can fulfil herself in life regardless of her sex. The difference discourse in Meriläinen’s analysis seemed to come into the picture when they spoke about their dual roles as career women and mothers. As parents, they seemed to locate themselves in a fairly traditional gender role by taking the position of an attending parent. In addition, the female bank managers represented qualities traditionally linked with femininity such as empathising, caring, co-operative in the realm of business life as a part of their professional identity. Thus, the constructions of identity seem to be at least partially in line with the position taken – whether the participant adopts the mother position or the career position. It could be that the stereotypical representations of motherhood are limited – there are not

many discourses to draw upon if a participant wants to present 'a good mother' identity.

The 'working man as the primary breadwinner' is one of the basic institutions in modern societies. This does not exclude other roles the modern men can take as fathers (participatory, caring, assisting, etc.) (Julkunen 1995, 97.) Nevertheless, the norm as men as working and being in the participatory / assisting roles towards the caretaking in the family has provided men with the possibility of treating their career and profession as a 'self-evident right'. The caretaking of women makes it possible for men to live in the world of abstract ideas and the big picture (see also Marlow 2002). As a cultural code the 'professional' is gendered: it is created on the gendered division of work. (Silius 1995, 57-58.) For example, in the story of Samuel he introduces the lack of freetime as a possible negative side in entrepreneurship but then renounces it by explaining that entrepreneurship is something he truly enjoys, and the negative aspect of having no freetime is compensated by the enjoyment entrepreneurship brings.

In this particular sub-chapter I have connected the issue of gender and family in a seemingly natural way (see Ahl 2002, 164-165). However, this view could also be contested and elaborated on. It is with regard to the family that the women with families in this study provided a different entrepreneurial story than the men with families in the study, which provided me with an impetus to connect these here. However, future studies in entrepreneurship might more consciously aim at investigating the role of gender with regard to entrepreneurship and also cover other aspects than the family.

5.3.5 Entrepreneurial success

There are a lot of studies of entrepreneurial success of which the majority emphasise the financial and measurable outcomes. However, there are studies that underline that success is not a monolithic factor but can be split into both material and non-material measures (Mitchell 1997). In the interviews and the prior guiding letter I ask the entrepreneurs to describe events or times that have been rewarding for them in entrepreneurship. Already my initiation is a cue that I am not looking simply for success that can be measured financially. Hence, it is no wonder that different kind of stories could be found, and in the following I will discuss some of the elements that came up in the interviews.

5.3.5.1 Making a living as a measure of success

Clearly for some entrepreneurs survival, i.e. 'making a living out of the company' is a measure of entrepreneurial success. For example, Marge after her first year in entrepreneurship is relatively happy with it as she has convinced herself that it is possible to make a living out of her business, thus, providing her with self-confidence with regard to her decision and career. In addition, Eliza confirms that her first round of entrepreneurship was a success because it provided a living for her. It could be that for the sole entrepreneurs survival, making a living, is a sufficient measure of success while the entrepreneurs with employees face a more complicated picture.

In addition, it could be that for those who feel that their career is a vehicle for self-realisation (Adamson 1997), for example, individuals who start up in entrepreneurial ventures to be able to work in their professional area rather than in administrative work (Ram 2000), the most important measure for the success is the ability to work in the preferred area.

5.3.5.2 Social rewards

In the entrepreneurial stories one of the most important strands or themes of discussion are the various social rewards that make entrepreneurship a worthwhile endeavour. The emphasis is on both internal and external rewards. The feeling of doing a good job, being involved in important issues and seeing employees thrive and prosper at their work are constructed to be the important rewards from being in the business. The highlights deal also with public recognition either by customers or by interest groups through different kinds of publicity received, awards, medals or honourable mentions that are listed in the stories of entrepreneurs to represent the best things in their lives. This could suggest that entrepreneurship is a lonely business where it is difficult to get feedback from others but when one does, it is source of joy and pride for the entrepreneur. It demonstrates that the personal good feeling of doing an important and good job is being recognised and appreciated by others as well.

5.3.5.3 Social meanings of money

The desire to gain personal wealth has often been named as an important reason for people going into entrepreneurship although there is a lot of evidence that it is not the only reason or at least not among the most im-

portant reasons even in the growth-oriented technology ventures (Amit et al 2000). In this study, wealth and money were not issues that came up very often. The fact that money and wealth are not spoken of at length in the interviews could also result from the need of the entrepreneurs to concentrate on portraying a humble, laborious socially responsible entrepreneur instead of someone ‘shovelling money into his own pockets’. Given the years when entrepreneurs were mainly understood as capitalists exploiting the workforce for getting rich (Hyrsky 1999) it is quite understandable that the entrepreneurs in this study do not want to be part of renewing the image but want to be part of producing an entrepreneurial image for our current society as being responsible for job creation, employment and economic well-being.

The information technology industry of the late 1990s marked, however, an era where some of the entrepreneurs in the field did accumulate important personal richness through IPOs or by selling their businesses to other companies. Those entrepreneurs that succeeded in gaining wealth and bought luxury cars and yachts were particularly visible in the media. Hence, I argue that the general public considered it both easy and legitimate that IT entrepreneurs must, should and will get rich. It is against this prevailing cultural understanding that Timothy in my study needs to tell his story (6.6, p. 217). He is ironic about ‘getting filthy rich’ as a desirable goal, about his student years spent at the business school shovelling money in the Excel –programme as a part of making his future plans in order to construct the opposite: his sincere wish to do a good job and help his clients in their businesses by providing them with solutions.

Although the idea for being in the business is not framed as a wish to make money for the participants in this study, i.e. there are some remarks where personal salaries are negotiated in order to invest more money in the business yet some feel that the pay-back day should and will come some day. In this way the sacrifices made are considered an investment for the future. Of course, the need to make a profit is not totally ignored by the entrepreneurs as a measure of success because it is needed for maintaining the business or for creating a buffer against economic downturns.

5.3.6 Surviving failures and building for increased security

5.3.6.1 Bankruptcy as a learning experience

Clearly bankruptcy could be deemed a failure in many respects. However, from the business dynamics view bankruptcies are a part of busi-

ness life. In this study Arthur's story of his bankruptcy is a story of learning (6.7, p. 242) and in this way follows the understanding developed by Stokes and Blackburn (2002) that the closure of a business could be understood as 'learning the hard way' and not as a failure that stigmatises the entrepreneur. The element of 'stigma', however, is also present in Arthur's story as he talks about the changes in the financier's conduct towards the company as the contact people at the bank change and Arthur's company becomes merely 'another bankruptcy case'.

Based on another study on bankruptcies the individuals experiencing it share an experience of the events just tumbling down without having any effect on their personal lives. The feeling of totally losing external control was found to be a common element for Finnish people facing bankruptcy, unemployment and over-indebtedness. At the same time it is argued that for a person to feel good mentally and spiritually, a notion of being in control of one's life is of great importance. (Lampela-Kivistö 2000, 164-190, Lampela-Kivistö et al 2001, 477-478.) In the case of Arthur in this study he continues the business activities directly after the bankruptcy. It is also suggested that for those entrepreneurs who are not willing to give up entrepreneurship but pursue business activities after the bankruptcy the mental strain is reduced (Lampela-Kivistö 2000, 228-229). There are, however, many entrepreneurs who experienced entrepreneurship to be the only career alternative but lacked both mental and financial resources to continue the business activities and became unemployed. For those, coming to terms with unemployment turned out to be very difficult causing other social problems as well; loss of family, property or self-esteem, which further strengthened other problems such as overuse of alcohol, loneliness, depression and even suicidal notions. (Lampela-Kivistö et al 2001, 475-476.)

5.3.6.2 Building security

Risk-taking or bearing ability is one of the key attributes assigned to entrepreneurs. In this study, the entrepreneurs engaged in various strategies to build security and downplay the risks involved. The setting up of the company is built against the lack of other options as 'a nothing to lose' situation, or the participant emphasises that the effects will only be personal and not to affect other people, for example, the lack of children or the ageing of the children are used as framework conditions that facilitate the setting up decision. In the case of Jonathan, he also remains at his teaching job as long as he can in order to make the transition easier economically and personally. Thus, in this study the entrepreneurs did not

emphasise the risks but engaged in telling stories of reducing the risks to manageable ones.

The entrepreneurs in this study also constructed security for their own future in terms of remaining in entrepreneurship. This was substantiated by providing examples of turning down job offers and, for example, applying the metaphor of a journey where the participant is so 'far' into entrepreneurship that turning back is no longer possible (Eliza). Albeit experiencing difficulties in the past the future, however, is described and understood in positive terms.

5.3.7 Family business issues

5.3.7.1 Working in a family business

The participants in this study did not identify their businesses as family businesses, and the talk did not propose any family members that would be owners or actively participate in the business. There was, however, an interesting idea proposed in Eliza's story of the family business as the working environment from the employee's point-of-view (p. 6.3.4, p. 165). She felt that the family business is a category within the various business formats that has particular problems: the owner-manager finds it difficult to delegate responsibility and recognition to a hired employee. Employees are kept in the background, while the owner-managers place themselves in the foreground. These ideas reflect the findings in which it is claimed that the family ethos is superior to the business ethos in family businesses (Reid – Adams 2001).

5.3.7.2 Business succession issues

Business succession is an event that confronts virtually all viable organisations. There is a widespread interest towards the succession issue especially from one generation to the next one that has been widely studied and is currently seen to dominate the research area (Dyer – Handler 1994, Fox et al 1996, Morris et al 1997, Dyck et al 2002). The succession process in (small) family owned firms is quite different from the large publicly owned companies. This results from the coincidence of family and business interests within the family firm, and from the fact that the frequency of succession is greater in a larger firm, and is normally better planned in advance. In addition, the number of possible successors is limited in a family business (Fox et al 1996). More research is needed of the roles of the different actors in the succession process (especially that of

the successor) and of the relation between firms and their environment (Brunåker 1999).

The assumption that there is always a successor within the family is however false. Research results regarding whether potential successors intend to join the business suggest that first of all, the overall intentions of participants to join the family business were low. However, when employment conditions are unfavourable or unpredictable, offspring would be willing to join the firm. The factors affecting the willingness to join or not to join the company seem to depend on the personal needs, goals, skills and abilities of the offspring. The factors that drive offspring away from the family business include family membership, dynamics, values, relationships and desires. This expresses the need of the younger generation to break free from the family and its traditions and to create their own identity. (Stavrou - Swiercz 1998, Stavrou 1999.)

In this study three participants were at least partially preparing for the business succession by explicitly identifying a need for it in the coming years (Rosemary) or by advocating the need to gradually start altering the role of the entrepreneur (Jonathan, Arthur) in the company. Their children were not identified as the successors of the company, and it seemed that the choice of the successor and the related process will be a challenge that the entrepreneurs will face in the coming years.

In this chapter I have discussed some of the themes from the stories of entrepreneurs that were either important themes in structuring many individual stories or an overriding theme in one particular story. In the next chapter I will present the individual entrepreneurial stories where these themes are also applied as the building blocks in the individual stories. I will not deal with all the themes in each story since some of the themes were not important to all of the participants. In addition, the place of the particular theme varies in the different stories to reflect the variety in the different stories – they were not all chronologically similar stories. In addition, in the stories I have also sometimes slightly changed the phrasing of the themes in order to focus on a particular aspect in the individual story. In this way I hope that the themes do not override of the stories, i.e. that the stories have not been structured to fit a particular thematic structure but they are individually constructed.

6. STORIES OF ENTREPRENEURS

6.1 Rosemary's Story

Rosemary⁵ (in her late 50s') is an engineer and owns a factory that produces textiles. The factory is located in Craftsville due to the existence of a skilled labour force and subcontractors in the area. Rosemary currently lives in Bonnyville. The company currently has 7 employees and about 10 small subcontractors and has an annual turnover of about 0,85 Million Euros. This turnover is sufficient for Rosemary as she wants to invest in quality, original design and service (the three major assets of the company) and she does not want to go into mass production.

6.1.1 Presenting the scene

My supervisor suggested that I take Rosemary as my first interview as I wanted somebody who was relatively easy to talk to and who would be comfortable telling her story. When I called Rosemary to set the date for the interview, she asked whether I wanted to interview her over the phone. I told her that I would rather meet her in person. This discussion concerned me as it implied she did not have much time for the interview and past experience had shown that interviewees under time constraints are not very focused on the interview. I was able to convince her that we should meet in person and she invited me to her home – the pink house by the river in Bonnyville. I was relieved. Rosemary seemed very nice and talkative and addressed me by my first name throughout the telephone conversation,⁶ which gave me the impression that she took me under her wing and that she was interested in participating in the study.

A couple of days before the interview she called me again to say she was unable to meet me at her home, as she would be in the City and she had to go to her factory in Craftsville later that day. Instead, she suggested we meet at a café in a shopping mall. Again, I was concerned, as it is very difficult to have a meaningful discussion in a public place, not to mention the technical problems of trying to record an interview in a noisy

⁵ The names of the participant and the towns (Craftsville, Bonnyville) have been changed, as have the other names that are used in this story.

⁶ In Finland it is not very common to address a person by her name as in other cultures, for example the Anglo-Saxon culture.

environment. Luckily I was able to convince her to meet in a more private place, and we arranged to meet at the Female Business Club⁷.

Before the interview I had another engagement in the City, which took too much time so I was really worried that I would be late. I nearly panicked but luckily Rosemary was also a bit late as she stopped at a department store to get some pastries. She also gave me a present at the beginning of the interview; I got to choose from two different key rings – my choice was a boot to keep kicking me in the butt for luck during my dissertation process. Before we started the interview I told Rosemary my personal story in order to democratise the interview situation and to help her engage in the storytelling mode.

When Rosemary began her story she started by asking if she should start with her background. I thought this was a good starting point, and she started her story by repeating who she was: ‘So, my name is Rosemary Peters but you can call me Rose...’ It seemed that Rosemary wanted to make sure that my tape-recorder caught her name to ensure that she was easily identifiable from the other entrepreneurs participating in the study and to label the story as her story.

The atmosphere of the interview was very warm and amicable but nevertheless I was somewhat confused with it and my own role in it. After the interview I wrote some notes in my pad stating that I felt stunned and wondered if the tape-recorder had worked and if I had obtained all the information I was supposed to. This last remark is especially interesting suggesting that although my objective was to approach the interview without strict guidelines and to listen to the story of the entrepreneur, I had subconsciously developed quite a strict agenda for my interest area, which I became aware of only after the first interview.

Although I wanted the interview to be focused on the entrepreneur telling her story I had prepared some notes to help me ask some further questions in order to keep the interview going if necessary. I kept reading the notes during the interview to remind me of the points I had thought of and I used these notes to form questions if the interview seemed to stall and I could not think of any pertinent questions off the top of my head. This created some awkward pauses as I skimmed my notes and a sense of irrationality, as some of the questions did not seem in context as I have written in my notes. Overall, I did not feel I was in control in the interview and my own role in the interview was a surprise to me. I spoke more softly and in a more considerate way than in a normal work-life situation. I was the humble doctoral student, who was thirsty for the words of wisdom of the experienced entrepreneur. In a normal working

⁷ The name of the club is fictional and therefore cannot be found with this name.

environment I meet with customers and clients, and I need to portray myself as a professional. It would certainly not be acceptable to show the lack of understanding or knowledge, which I demonstrated in my meeting with Rosemary.

In retrospect, I am more satisfied with the interview than at the time. I realise that it indeed gave me a good start in my interviewing process. In the later interviews I had a better understanding of my own role in the interviews and could adapt more easily to the demands of each respondent. The first interview also demonstrated I was more focused on the start-up phase which Rosemary did not emphasise in her story and this insight meant I could be more reflexive towards the stories that the entrepreneurs did want to tell me. My experience in this first interview led me to take a different approach with other participants. I decided to write a short introductory letter to the other participants to invite them to tell stories and prepare themselves for the interview (see Appendix 1). In retrospect I can see that the first interview was an essential part of my personal learning process which I could not at the time of the interview. At that time I felt disappointed with my incapability to conduct the 'perfect interview'. I did however try to forgive myself which I noted at the time. Nevertheless, I felt exhilarated about Rosemary's story and in this way I was looking forward to the forthcoming interviews as well.

Rosemary and I met at the premises of the Female Business Club of which Rosemary is an active, prestigious member. On the table she placed examples of her products using a scarf to make the ensemble look like a shop window or a product presentation at a fair. I wondered if I should pay more attention to them and have a closer look at the products examining them one by one but instead I decided to proceed with the interview. Rosemary was dressed in a pink, well-cut suit and wore a scarf around her neck. She smiled a lot and told her story with a humorous undertone. Rosemary spoke very clearly but softly, which matched her whole persona. Maybe her gentle persona combined with my personal insecurity in the first meeting led me to adopt the little girl position as a doctoral student conducting the interview and allowed her to inhabit the matriarchal mentor position.

Rosemary started by talking about the start-up phase and my interventions focused on obtaining further details (like when the enterprise was set up, why in Craftsville although she now lives in Bonnyville, how many employees the company has etc.). In the rest of the interview besides asking for further details my questions were focused on the start-up phase although I was aware of the timelag between now and then:

Ulla: *It is however more than 18 years since the start-up so maybe it is a bit difficult to remember but – you said that you were not aiming at it, so how difficult or easy was it and what kind of things did it involve?*

Rosemary: *The start-up?*

Ulla: *Yes.*

Rosemary: *Well, it was kind of a difficult process... (continues)*

We then discussed issues like Rosemary's involvement in the Female Business Club and other associations, her family background and support networks, her plans for retirement and then again I returned to the start-up phase.

Ulla: *I'm jumping back and forth with these questions because I tried not to over prepare otherwise the discussion is framed around my questions not your story. So, can we go back to the start-up phase and discuss how others reacted to you going into entrepreneurship? Was it a surprise to your closest ones or was it just a natural solution for them?*

Rosemary: *Well this, I did not have any difficulties... (continues).*

These examples serve to show my interest in the start-up phase and especially on the potential difficulties at that phase but more generally it demonstrates the way researchers participate in the creation of the data. However, during the course of the interview I gradually realised that Rosemary's interests having set up the enterprise 18 years ago, were not centred around those issues and a new interesting theme emerged in the interview, that of the future and Rosemary's plans for retirement. It must be noted however, it is only after all the interviews had been conducted and analysed that I realised I focused particularly on the problems and difficulties related to start-up, a theme which continues in the other stories.

Since Rosemary was in the City just for the day and was heading for her factory in Craftsville later that day we decided the interview would only last an hour. She seemed relieved by this as was I. She was happy for me to interview her again when in her words 'you have talked also to others' indicating that she was aware of my being lost at times and making jumps back and forth in the interview. Rosemary also suggested that I talk to her mentee, Eliza, in the mentoring project, which I did (See 6.3, p. 160).

6.1.2 Opportunity presents itself

Rosemary started her business in 1982. She had been educated in various countries as an engineer and had a good professional background in the textile industry. Her main experience involved both designing shoes and bags and also being involved in exporting due to her knowledge of foreign languages and cultures.

In the early 1980's the factory where Rosemary had worked designing bags and taking care of public relations was closed down. This Rosemary described as something that often happened, which serves to normalise the situation and she categorised it as follows 'it was no big deal, it happens to everybody all the time'. Thus, the event is not an agonising one for Rosemary but a normal event in anybody's professional career and it simply led to Rosemary finding herself at a crossroads where she had several career alternatives to consider. Discussions over the summer with a colleague convinced her that she should start her own company. The existence of career alternatives is taken for granted by Rosemary in her story. She did not consider these alternatives to be pipe dreams and she did not think there would be any problems in finding and getting a new job as with the case of Marge (6.5, p. 202). This may be a reflection of the good economic situation at the beginning of the 1980s' as opposed to the midst of the economic recession of the 1990s when Marge was looking for a new job.

In Rosemary's story being made redundant is not emphasised it simply provided Rosemary with an opportunity and trigger to become an entrepreneur. This view is quite contradictory for example to the study by Kortteinen – Tuomikoski (1998, 23-37) where the event of being given notice is described as a humiliation and a shame irrespective of the gender or the social class of the participant. In their study they had interviewed long-term unemployed people. Therefore, it could be that the humiliation and shame of the dismissal arose from the position of being a long-term unemployed person rather than as an immediate reaction towards the dismissal. In the case of Rosemary, the ending of the story is a happy one (Rosemary is a successful businesswoman and entrepreneur) therefore a new meaning for the dismissal is created – that of the needed trigger rather than a humiliating experience.

The idea of becoming an entrepreneur in Rosemary's story is given meaning as a guidance of life rather than a life goal. This seems to be the common thread in most of the stories in this study – entrepreneurship is interpreted as the result of a chance although the meanings of the chance may vary. The discussions with Bridget, the foreman at the former com-

pany who was also left without a job were an important influence in Rosemary's decision, as Bridget decides to come work in Rosemary's business as the production manager although not as a partner with any financial responsibility. The setting-up of the company seemed to be quite unproblematic for Rosemary at least in retrospect - her children had left the nest, she had good skills, experience and contacts within the industry and when Bridget decided to come work for her in the new company there was little pondering or hesitating about the decision. Therefore, the story of the event is quite uncomplicated and straightforward, rather unemotional and rational. The role of being cautious or calculative is not emphasised although it is constructed as one of the weaknesses of female entrepreneurs in general, later in the interview.

I attempted to clarify our mutual understanding of the start-up process as a rapid process as I returned to the question of the start-up:

Ulla: You said there that it took only three days from the decision to when the company was there. How long was it, if you can remember, from losing your job to setting up the company, what was that time period?

Rosemary: This [losing the job] took place in the summer and in the summer it is of course a bit difficult to get things rolling when there are the summer vacations. But I talked with Bridget – it was in the end of June - and in August-September we had the business running.

Ulla: All in all in a very fast pace.

Rosemary: Yeah, but I did of course have very good contacts. I had been working in the industry for a long time, I had good customer contacts, material contacts, all these, so I did not have to create them from scratch. That of course helped - helped to get started quickly that is.

It seemed that she interpreted my comment of the 'fast schedule' if not as a suggestion that she had made the decision too fast, at least as a surprise that needed to be explained. Rosemary started explaining that she had very good customer and supplier contacts as she had been in the business for a long time so she did not have to start from the scratch.

Although the situational factors are at the forefront in Rosemary's story of setting up the company, intertwined to her personality and background are other factors such as being born with entrepreneurial genes in a family with a lot of entrepreneurs. Yet, she does not really identify with the other entrepreneurs in the family although she does acknowledge their importance as a wall on which to bounce ideas. This is at least partly to underline her own responsibility in establishing her company.

(see 6.1.4, p. 126 for further discussion). The idea of needing to have a special character to act as an entrepreneur is further underlined in Rosemary's reflections on who could act as an entrepreneur and her refusal of the Government initiative to promote entrepreneurship as a solution to unemployment. Rosemary draws a line between the entrepreneurs, including herself, who need to carry responsibility fulltime, and are prepared to carry the insecurity of not having a guaranteed salary as opposed to those enjoying a secure job where the instructions come from somebody else. Hence, the ideas of responsibility and insecurity are connected strongly to being an entrepreneur whereas they are removed from other more secure jobs.

It is possible to explain this rather neutral way of remembering and making sense of the event as the result of the time lag – at the time of the interview Rosemary had set up the firm and become an entrepreneur 18 years previously, so these events were not very topical for her. On the other hand, it could be that the economic situation at the time was good enough to allow a rather optimistic interpretation of one's career perspectives and of the positive outcomes as an entrepreneur. This position was strengthened by the situational context being suddenly left without a job, having no major family responsibilities, believing in one's own skills and engaging in a project with a trusted colleague which left little room for negative thoughts.

Rosemary marks a distinction between herself as a start-up entrepreneur then and the new generation by listing several examples of the help and support available now that did not exist before: the regional government centres, business agencies, reasonable loans and mentoring. In addition new entrepreneurs have improved awareness as they can better apply the available information. This is contrasted with her own ignorance and she engages in a story of how she went to see her first bookkeeper with three envelopes. In the three envelopes she had divided all her invoices, salary details and details of materials etc.. The face of the bookkeeper was something to be seen when she emptied all the envelopes on the table to arrange them again. Rosemary framed this as a learning experience: She learned that as an entrepreneur it is necessary to concentrate on the core business and not on tasks which could be delegated to those who had expertise in that area. Following this recollection Rosemary adjusted her position: *'In a way it was good that I did not know all the problems that would be ahead because it might have been discouraging and I would not have dared to take the path...'* This last phrase demonstrates Rosemary has changed her role – she steps down from her mentor role from which all information is necessary for an entrepreneur, and reposi-

tions herself to the scene at the time of the start-up to question herself that had she known all the things she knows now, would she eventually have had the courage to start the business?

6.1.3 Getting started – facing problems

The seemingly easy decision to establish the company in Rosemary's story is mirrored against the story of the first activities of the enterprise. I asked Rosemary to elaborate on her story of the start-up phase as I found it difficult to accept the short uncomplicated narrative. I wanted an elaborate, rich and detailed description of the start-up phase. Rosemary then started talking about the difficulties related to the start-up. The first difficulty related to organising financing for the company. It was rather difficult for her to get a loan, which she attributed to the non-existence of small business loans, and no female entrepreneur loans at that time. The existence of small business and female entrepreneur loans in Rosemary's story is quite revealing of how we construct our understanding of the past based on our knowledge of today. The lack of these specific loan instruments at the time of the event (early 1980s) would make it impossible to ascribe her difficulties as being the lack of these at the time, however, in retrospect Rosemary's involvement in the Female Business Club has made her specifically aware of those instruments. She now promotes these instruments to other start-up entrepreneurs and they have given her a means of organising her story against the 'non-existence' of the instruments, seeing her story in another light than at the time of the start-up. It echoes an anecdote of how Finnish parents use the phrase 'When I was young I had to ski to school every day' to explain how the current generation has it much easier making the parents' lives look much harder.

Nevertheless, like many other entrepreneurs Rosemary found it difficult to convince her bank manager to grant her a loan based on her education, expertise and other skills, instead she had to use a piece of property as collateral for the loan. The loan was divided into three parts, the first part was used for buying machines, the second part was reserved for salaries, rents and other running expenses and the third for buying materials. The 'story of the ruined materials' that Rosemary enters subsequently is the most important, thick story of her narration and it serves as the culmination point in her story. It helped Rosemary to take a new leap on the entrepreneurial ladder and it served as an important learning experience for Rosemary and Bridget, her production manager.

As a result of her long experience and good contacts Rosemary decided to import all her material from Italy as Italian materials were of

better quality and a better colour range, which would be a competitive advantage for her. It is this setting that frames the shock when the materials arrived:

But you can imagine Ulla my feeling when the first shipment arrived and I made all the tests, for example, how it [the material] tolerates water, how it keeps the colour when wet and then I noticed that it lost its colour. When all the others had left the factory at the end of the day to go home I sat on the piles of materials [and] I cried. I thought I'll never make it as an entrepreneur if the beginning is like this, using all the loan money and all and I cannot even use the materials. But then I pulled myself together and I have not cried since because of entrepreneurship although I have cried otherwise and also laughed maybe for another reason. Anyway we packed all the materials and sent them back. I then insisted that they were redone or that a new lot was made for me and I went there to inspect them before they arrived to Finland. So there it started.

Rosemary addresses me by name to take me closer to the event, to assure that I am personally involved in the story and that I understand the severity of that event. In the first part of the story Rosemary produces the identity of a weak, self-absorbed entrepreneur who is not capable to running the enterprise, which is soon abandoned in favour of a dynamic and strong entrepreneur. There are several indications in the story of it being a culmination point for her in her entrepreneurial career. She states that she has not cried over anything connected with the business since the debacle with the materials which makes the event a disastrous but a unique moment. The expression of 'pulling herself together' creates a visual image of someone who was crying desperately, feeling miserable and out of control who decides to straighten her back and to reclaim her own destiny by taking the necessary action. Rosemary ensures the materials are packed and shipped back to Italy. She and Bridget go to check every piece of material to ensure that the new shipment is correct. This trip is recounted as a memorable experience for both Rosemary and Bridget, and Rosemary recalls it as triumph and with humour. It is a continuation of the 'ruined materials' story in the sense that it closes the circle 'all's well that ends well' and it is a story of the mutual trust and companionship which exists between Rosemary and Bridget.

When Rosemary tells the story she describes the first morning where Bridget who has never been abroad, never taken a flight or stayed at a hotel starts to make the bed in the hotel. Rosemary tells her that it is not necessary as somebody will come and make the beds. By coincidence

there is a strike in Italy that day and the beds are not made. In the evening Bridget gives Rosemary the look ‘The boss thinks she knows everything....’ It is a story of the relationship between Bridget and Rosemary where Bridget is identified as Sancho Pancho, a somewhat rural yet very skilful and loyal assistant and companion who is valued in many respects and Rosemary is assigned the identity of a cosmopolitan who has taken her assistant under her wing.

The second scene in the story is their visit to the supplier’s factory where the supplier had already packed the new shipment and they are surprised that Rosemary and Bridget have reserved all day to go through the shipment. Apart from the women’s persistence, the suppliers are also surprised about Bridget, a blond femininely shaped female foreman. They find it acceptable that Rosemary is a woman as they can assume that there is a husband at home, or that she has inherited the factory from her father, but Bridget being the foreman and a woman is so astonishing for them that people (men) from six different factories come to see them. This again Rosemary tells as a funny little story and if I imagine the scene myself, it is funny especially after the event in the ‘told later’ sense (Billig 2001, 37-38) How did the two women feel on entering the factory to find all the men staring at them and other coming from outside to look at them? I could easily imagine feeling a little bit awkward and embarrassed at the scene but retelling it as a funny story of ‘the Northern women taking the initiative while the macho men were just stunned’ upon returning home. Nevertheless, the trip itself turns out to be a success as they got to choose the materials they were prepared to pay for, although the Italian suppliers had a man at each side looking at Bridget and Rosemary marking the materials. If the men started complaining Bridget pointed out the faults and made a sound ‘hoho’ (not being able to utter a word in Italian) to emphasise that she was right. The whole manoeuvre identifies them as ‘difficult ladies’, who are not worth trying to fool or play with. This can be interpreted against our cultural understanding of women being demanding, which produces the ‘difficult person’ identity. The whole trip is a learning experience in many ways and this procedure has now entered their programme and the ‘company rulebook’ as they now visit the factory every two years to ensure the materials they receive are good quality.

‘Then if you want to know more of these problems...’ Rosemary believes that my interest and aims in the interview are focused on the problems attached to entrepreneurship. The next big problem and obstacle the company faced was the devaluation of the Finnish mark. Rosemary had all her loans in foreign currency, something she defends with her begin-

ner's insecurity. Her explanation is that these were the acts of the protagonist, not of the narrator. As a beginner she based her decisions on the recommendations of the bank manager and the devaluation was a big setback to her company. In a way, in this incident Rosemary has ascribed the responsibility for the subsequent consequences of the decision away from herself and onto the shoulders of the bank manager. This can be interpreted as her realisation that in order to be in control she has to take full responsibility which is a recurring theme in the interview: in the beginning she was more eager to listen to others, but she has learned the hard way to think and make the decisions herself and to bear the responsibility for those decisions.

In Rosemary's story, there are several important and powerful events that I have interpreted to be learning experiences but there is only one that she identifies explicitly as a source of learning:

I had had an English customer who left all his invoices unpaid which was another thing that nearly made my company go belly up because it was a rather big sum. From that I learned that you can never, ever trust a customer so much that you let his credit grow too big. Also in this case if I had had more experience I would have cut it much earlier. It was a question of a family friend and I was naïve enough to think that nobody does these kinds of things to your friend.

In the quote both explicit and implicit learning experiences are present. Although Rosemary only specifically identifies the case of the unpaid invoices as a source of learning this story is tied to other negative experiences that she has also learned from (the expression: 'Also in this case...'). The quote above reveals a negative and an embarrassing event – a family friend whom she has trusted does not pay his bills, an event that reveals her inexperience and naivety and which nearly caused her business to go bankrupt or at least get in serious difficulties. This construction of the event is made possible by the distinction between then and now. Rosemary (the narrator) who has nearly 20 years' of experience would not commit such a foolish mistake.

Yet, in Rosemary's story the whole idea of being able to make mistakes is linked to her definition of entrepreneurship – to be able to make mistakes, to understand the mistakes made, to learn from them and to be accountable only to herself is an important part of the joys of being an entrepreneur.

That is one of those issues that has intrigued me. As I am responsible only to myself for it, nobody comes to blame me if I some-

times make some foolish investments too. It is quite wonderful to be able to make a decision very fast not knowing whether it is so wise.

This again highlights a paradox: although Rosemary, the narrator, would no longer commit any foolish mistakes it is still part of the pleasure of being an entrepreneur to be able to make them and then to bear the consequences herself, thus acknowledging again her responsibility.

6.1.4 Together and alone

In Rosemary's story there is a paradoxical construction of the role of others in her business. Firstly, she emphasises that the role of Bridget, her production manager, has been pivotal for the business. The start-up was discussed a lot with Bridget and Bridget's decision to come to work for Rosemary is constructed as one of the triggers that gave Rosemary enough courage to set up the company. Bridget's role in the early years of the company is also much appreciated by Rosemary as she manages to buy the machinery second hand and is of help during the first trip to Italy. In addition, Bridget's involvement facilitates the distribution of work between the two as Bridget is in charge of production within the company and Rosemary takes care of sales, marketing and the running of the company. Currently, it also allows Rosemary to live quite far away from the factory and to spend on average only two days each week at the factory, which would be impossible if she had to oversee all the day-to-day routines. At the same time, it is important for Rosemary to be the sole owner of the company, and she has been the sole shareowner in the company ever since the change in the law allowed this. This makes me wonder whether Bridget would have liked to become a partner or did she prefer her role as an employee? I am also curious as to why Rosemary places such a strong emphasis on being in the business alone. She makes several references in her storytelling to enjoying taking full responsibility for the company, for example in the case of the ruined materials, she waited until others had left the factory before starting to cry. Taking full responsibility is an important component of her vision of the 'good entrepreneur' creating the idea that this is what entrepreneurs are supposed to do. It is also a source of satisfaction for her as an entrepreneur, being able to take risks and having full responsibility for the company. Does she believe that if she had a partner she would no longer be so free to make mistakes but would need to negotiate the decisions with the partner and, thus, be running the risk of entering into the corporate decision-making world?

Although the I-position is occupied very strongly in Rosemary's story she refuses the 'Lone Ranger' identity. Sharing of rewards and successes with others is a very important and reoccurring theme, and many different examples are given. She emphasises the role of her employees in the company and their importance is further strengthened by the use of her vocabulary 'those that work with her, her co-operation partners'. Furthermore, she extends her own business to include those of the 'friend businesses' (the subcontractors) of the enterprise. In these two examples Rosemary refuses the old or more established (masculine?) words for the phenomena and uses the label 'friend companies' rather than subcontractors. Rosemary's concept of friend companies suggests that the concept is laden with emotions and feelings, and that there is also a personal relationship between the companies. This is in contrast to the terms contractor and subcontractor which implies a formal business relationship devoid of emotion and personal connection. There are seven people that Rosemary refers to as the 'heart of the company'; those who are on full-time pay in the company. Again, she uses a vocabulary that is more feminine than the masculine 'core' that is mostly applied in management talk.

She also emphasises work satisfaction for her employees. It is important to her that all those who have been with her have enjoyed working for the company for more than 15 years.

And if the company is very big so it goes more into mass production. And that also for me [what] is infinitely important - job satisfaction. So for example all those that have been with me have been here for over 15 years. So I invest enormously in creating an environment that means my co-operation partners like to come to work in the morning and love to be [at work]. And then it is possible to have another kind of touch when the company is smaller.

Rosemary works towards and thinks it is very important that her employees love come to work in the mornings. She enjoys the personal touch of being the owner of a smaller company. This is given as the reason for resisting the growth of the firm, as it would imply losing the personal touch, not knowing every employee personally. Rosemary gives many examples of sharing activities, for example, when the company started exporting to England Rosemary took her whole crew with her so that all of them could see what the competition there was, how good they had to be to compete in that market. She also gives examples of other events where she has invited the whole staff although it was just her who was given a particular award. In a way this is a source of satisfaction for herself as an entrepreneur as it is important for her that her crew enjoys

working for the company and she tries to come up with new ways to pamper them, such as taking a trip together, going to a concert, anything to interrupt the normal routines. In addition, when Rosemary launched the business she bought all her employees lucky charm rings where new amulets have been added when something nice has happened. These rings serve as a reminder of the good days when things are not going so well. These shared symbols and sharing successes is a way of motivating her employees, creating a sense of togetherness in the company as well as being personally rewarding for Rosemary.

From a human resource management perspective her activities could be labelled as those of a skilful manager motivating her employees to enjoy work and working for the company as a team as opposed to trying to invent efficiency measures that would create individual benefits for each employee. Her interest in investing in her employees could also be seen as a reaction against current management where the interests of the shareholders are paramount even at the expense of other interest groups. Profitability is sought especially in the textile industry by relocating production outside of Finland to countries with lower salaries. Her focusing on employee welfare can be seen as a resistance towards these global trends. By placing herself at the core and in the key position she assumes primary responsibility for the work satisfaction of her employees. In this way her management style can be labelled matriarchal, which is supported by the emotional and affectionate vocabulary applied to describe her employees.

6.1.5 Family matters

Role of the family for the business

Although Rosemary's family were not at the forefront when she established the company, she constructs the role of the family (her parents, brother and sister having all been entrepreneurs) as a good foundation to build from. They acted as a sounding wall for her ideas, and she has discussed many things with the family.

Rosemary's family did not have any problems with Rosemary setting up the company, which can be partly explained by the rapidity of the set up process. In a way the company was a fact before anybody even realised what had happened. The second explanation Rosemary provides is that her parents have always been very encouraging and democratic in their parenting, raising Rosemary, her sister and brother in an equal way that provided Rosemary with good self-esteem. Therefore, becoming an

entrepreneur was not something that would have been reserved for her brother only but it was equally available to all the children in the family. Thirdly, Rosemary's own children accepted the decision. The unreserved acceptance Rosemary accredits to the sudden loss of her job, which created an acceptable platform for entrepreneurship in the views of her family as compared to the situation if she had left a secure job. The same theme – the disapproval of foolish career moves - is also taken up in the story of Diane (6.4, p. 182)

Mentoring, support networks and the idea of having someone helping in the early days of being an entrepreneur is an issue that is close to Rosemary. However the paradox is that in the early start-up phase when one needs help the most, one is also very consumed by the day-to-day work of the enterprise, as she was. She links this back to the story of her family, of her children who at the time had left the nest to go study and work which allowed her to work longer hours than the normal working day. It is important for her to clearly state how it was possible for her to manage both business and family life. After discussing how independent her children were at that time, she takes a pause before saying:

Rosemary: But none of the children are coming here - in this. They have seen so many of the downsides because their father at one time went into bankruptcy so it has been of course a sort of an example then that it isn't easy to become entrepreneurs.

Ulla: Has it been a disappointment for you? That the children have not...

Rosemary: No, no. I have not even encouraged them in this. Now it might be different - if my business had gone well from the very beginning then it would have been different but things were however so difficult in the first three years. There was the devaluation and all these other setbacks so that every time it [the company] pushed towards profit, there was some sort of an external thing that one as an entrepreneur could not do much about, so... It took such a long time that they [the children] all settled in their professions, and studies, and the direction of studies was not focused necessarily on becoming an entrepreneur.

Based on research (e.g. Birley 2001) entrepreneurs as parents may have different ambitions for their children's careers. Some wish for their children to come work and finally take over the business in order to continue the life work of the parents, others may wish their children to have a better, easier life and therefore to encourage their children to choose another career than an entrepreneurial one. In Rosemary's story she construes her children not coming to work in the business as a natural event

by referring to the bad sides of entrepreneurship (bankruptcy) that the children had to witness. In addition she recounts the problems she herself had as an entrepreneur in the beginning, the long period (3 years) before she got the business up and running and the educational choices of the children not being geared towards an entrepreneurial career as further reasons for them not entering the business. Thus, although Rosemary accepts the decisions of her children it is important for her to provide explanations for it and to interpret it as a sensible and meaningful choice. Since the business is blooming and the future of the employees need to be assured closing the business is not an option, therefore continuity of management needs be secured by choosing someone other than a family member to take over the business. There is increasing policy concern regarding the transfer of businesses either to the next generation or a third party as a result of the ageing population of entrepreneurs: many Finnish entrepreneurs are currently in their mid-fifties, so in the coming few years the success or failure of the transfer of their businesses will be a major issue for the Finnish economy (Stenholm 2002).

Rosemary's current partner lives in Copenhagen which has been helpful for Rosemary in terms of devoting more time to her personal life that was possible at the beginning of her entrepreneurship. This has also enabled her to learn to refuse some of the duties or requests that she now gets as a successful and prominent entrepreneur. She tries to commit the time they spend together, mostly weekends, to really taking the time as a personal time, which also balances her life. The 'totality' of being an entrepreneur is being ruptured by the weekends, which she commits fully to her personal life. A positive side of the long distance relationship is, however, that during the week she can work long hours without anybody complaining. This suggests that Rosemary acknowledges the possibility that as an entrepreneur her long working day would not necessarily be acceptable to a partner or family and she would have to face complaints or to limit her hours.

Illness in the family – business in danger

Previously I have discussed the examples of ill fortune and adversities in Rosemary's story mainly from the business point-of-view but the hardships caused by illnesses in the family are also a setback for her business. The two – family and business – are intertwined especially as Rosemary has maintained full responsibility and many of the major tasks of the company with herself.

Then another thing that has also been a risk factor - that has been a sort of a risk factor - in my entrepreneurship is that it is very much built on my strengths. If something happens to me the whole company is in the danger zone. This I realised when - there was the year that my husband died in January, then my father died in April and then my mother died in June. All during six months. They were all seriously ill so I had a feeling that during the year I was always sitting at a hospital, every free minute I got. And it meant that I didn't have the energy to create the enthusiasm in me that is needed when selling. The sales were too dependent on me. Afterwards we were pretty much at the bottom - I think that I would have given up if it wasn't for the fact that I had still had so many people - a dozen people who would have ended up unemployed if had just sat on my bum and felt sorry for myself.

The illnesses in the family are seen as having had a strong impact on the business, which is interpreted through the framework of Rosemary taking too much responsibility for the business. She believes the business is too founded on her and her strengths and belief, suggesting that to a degree she needs to develop solutions to separate the personal and the business.

This is a point in her entrepreneurial career that she identifies as a moment when she considered ceasing business activities. However, the feeling of responsibility for the employees and subcontractors is given as an explanation for giving up and 'just sitting on her bum feeling sorry for herself'. So she pulled herself together, (which is the same expression she used after crying over the ruined materials) and starts to train a new person, Sadie, to also be involved in sales. For Rosemary this is the solution to make the business less vulnerable. Currently Sadie takes care of about 50% of the sales and could replace Rosemary in the sales role if necessary.

It is also noteworthy that the difficult eras in the business and time horizon that have added to her understanding of the business activities as a cyclical process whereby good times follow bad times and vice versa. For example, she is preparing for the next recession at the time of the economic upswing. It could be that such a view of the business is only internalised if and when difficulties are encountered on a personal level, when risks materialise and something unpleasant and disturbing happens. If business activities run smoothly from the beginning it may add to the assumption that difficulties are not imaginable as the possibility of failure are not taken seriously as in the story of Arthur (See 6.7, p. 236).

The story is also informative and educational in another sense: entrepreneurs lack opportunities to recreate a new balance between the work

(entrepreneurship) and the family in times of personal crisis hence contributing to the totality image surrounding entrepreneurs. It is economically difficult and in some cases impossible to devote more time to family and recreate a new balance between the entrepreneurial sphere and family sphere. It could also be argued that this risk is especially evident in the case of sole entrepreneurs (Diane) or if the entrepreneur is solely responsible for a crucial task within the enterprise (Rosemary). Although work may be important in times of personal crisis, offering a place to withdraw to from time to time, the 'totality' of being an entrepreneur is made explicit in these kind of difficulties. In this study it is only women who engage in narrations of integrating family and work life so I wonder if men feel the similar pressure as entrepreneurs and as sons of ill parents? (See for further discussion Hytti forthcoming)

6.1.6 Enjoying life as an entrepreneur

Being an entrepreneur is a certainty and a fact of life that is not challenged in Rosemary's story. This is grounded in the long period that she has been in business (18 years) and her enjoyment of taking all the risks herself and making fast decisions. Rosemary enjoys the speed of decision-making that is currently available to her, which she compares with working for other companies with slow decision-making systems. She has the freedom of making mistakes, sometimes even stupid ones, to invest in the welfare of employees and to be accountable for these decisions only to herself. This is the core of what could be labelled 'entrepreneurial freedom'. Personal independence and fulfilment have often been found to be important goals for entrepreneurs but their meaning for entrepreneurs have turned out to be different (e.g. Pitt 1998, 392).

In the interview we discussed the difficulties, difficult moments and doubts regarding entrepreneurship so I returned to the theme:

Ulla: We previously touched on the time when there was the moment - there was this year with the deaths - you might have given up but the responsibility for your employees stopped you, so have there been other such moments when you experienced this despair or have you always believed in it?

Rosemary: There have been a lot of other types of moments, for example, a completely tremendous experience was when the board of the Craftsvill Entrepreneurs' Association awarded the Golden Cross to me. It was quite an exquisite feeling to receive such an award. (continues)

Rosemary refused my request to elaborate on the narration of the difficulties she encountered but chose instead to recount a story of a glorious moment. At this point Rosemary therefore feels that the difficulties have been discussed adequately and she needs to talk about positive aspects, ‘raison d’être’, the glory of being an entrepreneur, which are tied to the recognitions she and her company have gained and to her story of sharing these successes and glorious moments with her employees. She says that it was a great feeling to receive the Golden Cross that the local entrepreneurs’ association awarded her. In addition, she has applied for all the awards available for her employees from the chamber of commerce once they’ve been working for a certain number of years at the firm and it points out that it is a fantastic moment to receive those awards together. The firm was also awarded the ‘international award for quality’ the only Finnish company to receive the award, and although Rosemary was the only one in London to receive the prize, in her speech she thanks her crew. When Rosemary was selected as entrepreneur of the year in Crafts-ville, she phones the town mayor to ask if she can take her crew with her. Later the mayor told that he had been drinking coffee and choked when Rosemary asked the question, which Rosemary interpreted as an acceptance. Rosemary emphasises the unusual nature of this event. Normally it is the entrepreneur alone who receives the prize and the occasion is formal, but when Rosemary takes all her girls with her it becomes a warm informal occasion. She thinks it was the right thing to do since it is not just her efforts which led to her being elected entrepreneur of the year. These events serve to remind that entrepreneurship is not just about problems and struggles but also of good moments and to provide a balance between the rewarding moments and the difficult ones told previously. The awards and other successes are also interpreted as the result of pulling together; working as a team, and therefore the sharing of successes in the company becomes a meaningful and necessary endeavour.

6.1.7 Preparing for retirement

Sharing wisdom – being a role model

Rosemary describes her current position as being much easier than it used to be, when she felt incredibly alone, and she thinks the situation is similar for most entrepreneurs. Now the business is doing well, it is an established company and she has shared some of her duties. She currently lives quite far from the factory, and often travels to Copenhagen to meet her partner, so Bridget is in charge of the everyday production. Rosemary

has found the time to do other things than just being in business, she is involved in the activities of the Female Business Club, and in the mentoring project of the Club. Her idea is that she wants to help others when she now knows how an experienced person's broad vision may be of help to the start-up entrepreneur. Rosemary is Eliza's mentor who was also interviewed for this study. Rosemary sees mentoring as an opportunity to demonstrate to new entrepreneurs that if she can make it, others will make it as well.

Since Rosemary is involved in the Female Business Club it is curious that Rosemary believes that being a woman has not harmed her business and that it makes no difference if an entrepreneur is a woman or man. Do women entrepreneurs face greater disadvantages than male entrepreneurs or is the comment a reflection of the obvious disadvantages faced by women in other careers, for example, as engineers? I ask whether being a woman has been an advantage for her and she confirms that it has and explains that she was the first to sell business gifts directly to businesses and her contacts were nearly always (mostly male) managing directors. They invariably wanted to see what kind of a person she was, and so she got access to see them and her case therefore was half-won for her. Although being an entrepreneur is framed as a gender-neutral activity in Rosemary's story, becoming one is not, which is the reason for her active involvement in the Club. The need for the Club is grounded in women being more (too) cautious, needing a kick in the bum to take the first step although Rosemary does not construct an image of being too cautious at her own start-up. As an example of women's caution Rosemary's explains that men will think nothing of using the family home as collateral for a business loan whereas she has never heard of any woman doing the same. This generalisation is applied as an example of how women need more encouragement and support to become entrepreneurs, a view, which is supported by the thousands of women who have visited and looked for support at the Club. Further justification for the existence of the Club is offered by suggesting that women find it easier to talk to other women than men. This idea Rosemary bases on her personal, first-hand experience: the bank manager did not understand her brilliant ideas although she clearly had both the brains and business experience, which means that other female entrepreneurs in the service sector, needing only small loans, have it even harder. It seems that it is necessary to provide explanations and justifications for the Female Business Club although Rosemary does not directly speak of any resistance it has encountered (see also Diane's story 6.4, p.182).

Although she identifies herself as a role model, Rosemary does not have any herself apart from her parents and even they are assigned the identity of a couple in entrepreneurship, again emphasising her role as an individual entrepreneur, which is important to Rosemary. She, however, acknowledges the importance of role models that are close to people comparing them against faraway role models like Golda Meir or Margaret Thatcher. Her understanding of the need for role models is therefore that of strong and powerful female role models, especially for female entrepreneurs. Her engagement in mentoring and other activities in the Club is a way of being a role model. Her willingness to share entrepreneurial events where she is portrayed as a weak or incompetent entrepreneur is made sense of through her mentoring activities where she uses them to encourage others that 'if she has made it, others will also'. In this respect Rosemary narrates her story as a success story where she has grown from the entrepreneur crying at the material piles to be an entrepreneur knowledgeable in business and its requirements to the extent that she can tell the story to others.

Unofficially she describes her partner, who has been a CEO in many multinational companies and is currently working as an independent consultant, as her mentor and as someone she can use to bounce ideas off (like her family). The coexistence of the private and professional spheres in the relationship is made evident: If they have an argument she later calls him to talk to him as a mentor to discuss how to deal with a 'silly partner', and the argument is usually resolved. Placing the partner in the mentor role forces them to move from the personal level to the professional, which helps to resolve the personal arguments.

Remaining active

Originally, it was Rosemary's retirement plan to move to Bonnyville where she felt her roots were because her mother was born there and where she also had a summer place. This plan however comes true earlier than planned. This remark makes me ask her about her retirement, what kind of ideas she has for it? It is also this theme that specifically catches me by surprise in the interview as originally I had been absorbed by the start-up phase. It is an eye-opener on the future-orientedness of life and the narrative told about life. Retirement is something that is gradually becoming an issue for Rosemary, which means that she needs to think about the business succession and transfer. In this way Rosemary's story is linked to the thousands and thousands of stories of entrepreneurs fac-

ing retirement whom do not have a successor in the family for the enterprise.

Ulla: Have you thought then specifically [about] the retirement and what then?

Rosemary: Yes, I have thought about it quite a lot. The intention is that I try to find a successor, and I try to find [it] relatively soon while I'm still in such good shape. The business has been built around my strengths to a large extent so that I could sort of act as a mentor for the new successor and transfer all my know-how to her/him. And maybe I could be here for half a year or a year - whatever it takes - be partly involved.

The question of the successor is dealt with rather laconically and superficially. Rosemary does not elaborate on her strategies for locating one nor do I question her on her strategy. It seems that it is more of an idea that Rosemary knows and understands she will have to deal with but has not done anything concrete about it. The phrase 'It is the aim that I intend to find a successor' is similar to the phrase 'I need to start exercising more' indicating that the speaker is well aware of the problem (need to find a successor, need to start exercising) but lacks the details about the course of action required (when and how). Rosemary's own role is seen as pivotal in the succession phase in transferring all her know-how to the successor and mentoring her or him from six months to a year. This is based on the business being founded around her strengths and her personality.

The process of fading gradually into the background of her business and therefore assuming a pensioner identity is not fully accepted by Rosemary but she has engaged in several 'survival strategies' to remain active in retirement. She also runs another enterprise: an agency for importing goods and this business is her continuing thread in entrepreneurship and business life once she has retired from the other company. The agency facilitates her doing some designing and other work. Besides being on the Board in the Female Business Club Rosemary is a member of two other boards of federations. Her involvement in the different boards is partly a means to share and transfer her knowledge and experience but also an important device in keeping her active and having something meaningful to do after retirement. She describes herself as being in an interim phase – still involved fulltime with the business but also having several other duties that she can pursue once she is retired. Keeping busy and active can be seen to be metaphorical of our culture in general: the idea of being lazy, unproductive or passive is not culturally accepted

even in retirement. Pensioners need to travel and explore, have a lot of hobbies since they are finally in a position to have the time to do things. 'Busier than ever' is a phrase that we expect to hear from retired people. (See also the story of Eliza 6.3, p. 160) On the other hand, the idea of retiring may be specifically difficult for entrepreneurs who have, over the years, adapted to the conditions and pressures of business. In research on the succession within businesses, it is often found that one of the obstacles in the succession phase is the reluctance of the incumbent to really give up their power within the enterprise (for example Stenholm 2002).

The acceptance of the board positions is explained by her fear of not being asked once she is retired. This may be connected to our cultural understanding of the aged and retired as people who are no longer useful in business or economic life. The ones who have stepped out of the day-to-day business activities are assigned the identity of 'unwanted'.

From the gender perspective it is also interesting to look at Rosemary's story of joining the Rotaries in Bonnyville.

And then my networks - I belong to the Rotaries. I have lived in Bonnyville for over two years now so it was a sort of a conscious choice that I join the Rotaries, because it is an excellent way to get involved in the life in Bonnyville. If one comes as a stranger and outsider it takes a long time to get established and then there is the enterprise in another town, the Rotary Brothers, who have opened a lot of gates for me. In the beginning they were reluctant because they did not have any women in the Rotaries and it was a terrible shock [for them] when they realised that there are no rules or laws where it is said that women cannot be members, that it was just a custom.

Since she is a newcomer in the town she thought that joining the Rotaries was an excellent way of getting immersed in town life, and indeed the Rotary brothers have opened many gates for her. The fact that the Rotary brothers were traditionally a male only organisation and that they were a bit reluctant at first at being assigned the role of gate-openers is told as a humorous anecdote. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that Rosemary does not place herself in the 'nice girl identity' (as with her dealings with the Italian supplier). In family life it seems that the women need to adopt a rather traditional 'good mother / wife' role where it is necessary to ensure that home and family are taken care of despite the demands of entrepreneurship. However, in professional or other activities in the public sphere women can adopt new roles and even to question and enter the 'good old boys' networks.

6.1.8 Discussion on Rosemary's entrepreneurial identity

Rosemary narrates her story from the position of a successful and recognised entrepreneur. She is an active member of the Female Business Club and she is also actively involved in mentoring other entrepreneurs. The start-up decision is presented as a rather functional and uncomplicated event driven by the contextual and situational factors at the time.

Her story is a success story of a mature company that has gone through some difficult periods which has enabled Rosemary to learn from those events and become an experienced entrepreneur. This in turn has enabled her to help and be a role model for younger entrepreneurs by setting an example: 'if Rosemary has made it, I will, too'. Although being an entrepreneur is framed as a gender-neutral activity the start-up phase is portrayed as a gendered activity: women need more help and support than men, firstly, because women are too cautious and secondly, because women face greater difficulties in convincing their peers of the feasibility of their endeavours. Her involvement in the Female Business Club serves to help her share her story and her experience with younger entrepreneurs and is also a survival strategy for retirement to ensure she keeps busy and active.

The meaning of entrepreneurship for Rosemary is manifold; it enables her to take full responsibility of her business, her mistakes and decisions. It allows her to adopt a strong 'I' position as an entrepreneur by emphasising her role as the sole entrepreneur and being at the core of assuring the welfare and work satisfaction of her employees. It also allows her to share the successes with her employees and with the subcontractors and with other entrepreneurs who can learn from her. Rosemary as an entrepreneur today invokes a matriarchal mentor/teacher identity whereby sharing the successes with her employees and sharing her knowledge with other entrepreneurs is a key. Her identity is matriarchal in the sense that she assumes responsibility of the future and well-being not only of herself but of her employees as well as the subcontractors with an affectionate and motherly tone by calling them 'the heart of the company' and the 'friend companies'.

The story demonstrates the different identity positions of Rosemary throughout the narrative constructions of time, that of the protagonist: Rosemary taking the first steps as an entrepreneur making all kinds of silly mistakes and decisions, not knowing anything about bookkeeping, trusting blindly the suggestions of a bank manager and the promises of a client and running into different kind of problems but surviving through the persistence and tenacity that has helped her 'pull herself together' in

times of crisis and to take the necessary actions to correct the situation (travelling to Italy to correct the first shipment, educating a new sales person). The narrator, Rosemary, is enjoying the fruits of her entrepreneurship. She has chosen not to be fully consumed by the day-to-day activities of the enterprise but to engage in other activities of sharing her knowledge and expertise, finding a new balance in life by devoting weekends to personal life and preparing for the future retirement by engaging in survival strategies to remain active. However, in her story other identity positions co-exist with the entrepreneurial identities sometimes marginalising the latter— her being a mother, a caring wife and daughter and a partner all co-existing with the entrepreneur.

The story is told as a coherent and crystallised form, there are few fragments or frictions in the story, which question the certainty of her identity as an entrepreneur. The entrepreneurial identity is not being challenged but is strengthened by the existence of her entrepreneurial genes, her family background in entrepreneurship, her active involvement in entrepreneurship for nearly 20 years, and her being a leading figure in the Club and a role model for start-up entrepreneurs.

6.2 Jonathan's Story

Jonathan (43 years old) owns a business, which offers translation services. The company has a FIM 7,5 million turnover and currently employs approximately 20 fulltime people and a number of freelancers. Since 1995 the company has grown by 30% annually, and Jonathan expects this level of growth to continue over the coming years. The company works mostly with technical translations in the fields of computing, electronics and the heavy metal industry.

6.2.1 Presenting the scene

I briefly discussed my research idea at our office meeting in the hope of getting some help locating suitable participants for my study. As a result I receive the following e-mail from my colleague:

Hi!

I might have a lead for you. A former colleague who was a Finnish teacher set up a translation company while still working and if I remember correctly he left to work there full-time after a couple of years. The company is involved in technical translations and it has expanded a lot during the past few years. The interest-

ing thing about them is that part of the personnel is teleworking. The company is called "SmithWeb" and the managing director is Jonathan Jones. He might agree to participate despite his busy schedule.

This was the cue for me to contact Jonathan who agrees to participate in the study. He suggests that we meet on Saturday because he would not be distracted by work, which suits me fine. I persuade him to have the interview in his company office but we decide to meet in a café first. A few minutes before the meeting time he calls to say that he is taking his child out for a burger and will be a few minutes late. Jonathan is a dark-haired man in his forties wearing a fleece jacket and jeans – quite normal for a Saturday, but he strikes me as somebody who is not keen on wearing a suit in general. In the café I tell him about my research, what I am doing and what I want to achieve. When he learns who my supervisor is he is pleased because he knows her from the past and seems to respect her. I see the importance of my own project rise in his eyes so the interview starts in the best possible way.

Getting in the office is a bit of a problem because he has left his keys at home but after a few minutes he manages to find somebody to come open the door for us. I had sent him a brief note of the interview (Appendix 1) and he says that he has made some notes as I suggested in the letter but like the keys his notes are at home. In the interview he can recall some of the notes he made which helps to structure the story. For example, in reply to my question of the influential people for Jonathan's entrepreneurship he provides a list and it is possible to imagine those names being one of the notes he made as well. The company offices are situated in a very nice old building. The growth of the company is obvious because the offices are situated on two floors, and the office where we have the interview is quite crowded and Jonathan says that the other floor is even more so. In my eyes the interior of the office seems to be a practical 'will do' space. We sit down at a coffee table in the quiet office. First Jonathan asks me if I want to brief him again about the purpose of the interview. It seems he is a bit unsure of what I want to know and what kind of issues I am interested in. As I know that my questions are very simple (about important events and people, etc.) I decide to go ahead with my questions without any particular briefing at this point.

Jonathan speaks reflectively pausing frequently and seems to want to try to formulate adequate answers to my questions. The lack of a coherent and structured story catches me by surprise. Jonathan's story is told in bits and pieces and not as a great arch from beginning to the end, as was the case with Rosemary's story. Due to the lack of cohesion in the story I

find it quite difficult at first to follow his thinking and storyline. As a result I am worried that I will be unable to maintain the discussion or to promote enough issues to last the 1,5-2 hours I'd stated the interview would last. When reading the transcriptions I noticed that Jonathan seldom gave answers to my immediate questions. He started the story where he felt it important to start it, which might have contributed to me being not quite able to follow the story at the beginning of the interview. For example, to my enquiry about the setting up of the company he starts his answer by listing his educational background. When I ask a clarifying question whether he set up the company alone or with a partner he reinterprets my question against the larger framework of the earlier story. Afterwards I interpret this tendency as Jonathan's earnest aim of trying to provide me with a full and detailed picture of his entrepreneurial process. This is also an example how the participants are not bound by the questions the interviewer asks them but the questions can be actively reinterpreted and given new meaning by the participant. During the interview the story starts to emerge (for me) as the bits and pieces start to form a storyline and I am able to draw issues from his account, which need further discussion. In the end, the interview is the longest interview of the eight.

6.2.2 Exploring ideas; an opportunity presents itself

The story of the business starts from a rather extensive story of Jonathan's background, his studies, getting qualifications as a teacher and setting up the first company in 1988 '*just in case it would be needed*'. This idea is elaborated on later in the interview. In the beginning of the interview Jonathan presents different ideas and the interconnecting factors in a rapid way and I find it difficult understanding where the interview is heading. The setting up the company is justified by examining situations where they could end up needing to have a company (which eventually happens). All the ideas are knowledge-intensive ideas that involve people from different fields. The ideas dealt with for example urban planning or translating French philosophers and publishing them in paperback. The ideas are quite heterogeneous contributing to my confusion in following the storyline but during the interview they start to make sense as they are connected to different 'projects' in Jonathan's life.

The exploration phase ends when they receive an assignment by '*pure chance*' in 1990, which subsequently forms the basis for the current business. It is a chance in the sense that it arose through a friend, they did not actively apply or seek it. Yet it makes me to ponder whether the ex-

ploration provided them with the right mindset for this chance to take place. They played with different ideas so they were not fixed on any particular one but were able and ready to see the opportunities around them. The story echoes the ideas proposed in the recent entrepreneurship literature that entrepreneurship necessitates firstly, entrepreneurial opportunities and secondly that these are being explored, discovered and exploited (Shane – Venkatamaran 2000). However, since the assignment is received suddenly and it is unexpected whereas in the other endeavours the partners are actively weighing different options it is interpreted to be a chance.

The opportunity, the pure chance, in this story is a 1000 page computer manual that needs to be translated. Due to the huge amount of pages and the specialty language the friend, who first receives the offer, turns it down. Jonathan and Maurice, his future business partner, decide to take it. The justification Jonathan gives as to why they dared to accept the work although their friend did not is based on Jonathan's knowledge of computers and of the Finnish language and his partner's skills as a translator. Although it is something totally new for both of them, their combined knowledge and skills are used as reasons to explain why they had the courage to accept the assignment. The project is a success and results in further assignments from the same company, and they bring other friends into the business. In the beginning the enterprise is run on a rather collegial basis: the main aim is to make as much money as possible for everybody as those involved are mainly university students or recent graduates. Thus, the values of the business reflect the values of Jonathan at the time, which will be further developed in his story. The job is meaningful which also becomes a central theme in the interview.

In 1993, the company is restructured to better reflect the responsibilities of ownership. Jonathan shares the responsibilities with his partner, Maurice, in the company. At the time however, Jonathan is still working as a teacher – another important theme – and he only quits his job at the end of 1994. Since 1995 Jonathan has been working fulltime in the company and the company has grown steadily by 30% annually. These two items are linked in the interview suggesting that the transition from teaching to fulltime entrepreneurship has been a success. Currently Jonathan's partner has left the company to work elsewhere. Later, the theme of having a partner, Maurice, resurfaces in the interview as having had an important impact on the company. Jonathan ends his winding story of the start-up where the different elements and themes are touched upon and finishes by making a comment '*now my thoughts are blurred...*'

6.2.3 ‘Just in case’ – Jonathan’s life projects

At this point I ask whether Jonathan established the company on his own or with his friends. Jonathan interprets my question;

Well, in fact... okay, if we look at the mental process that you must have as a subject, we had the urban planning project in Forest Falls⁸.

In a way, the answer needs to be interpreted against my letter and our discussion before the interview as he does not reply to my question but reinterprets it by extending it from simply a question of ‘with partners or alone’ to a description or understanding of his mental process.

Forest Falls -project

One of the lines Jonathan introduces as meaningful is the Forest Falls project where he got involved in 1981. It was a community planning project that involved a multidisciplinary approach - that later turned out to have an important effect on Jonathan’s entrepreneurship. In 1988 Jonathan sets up an enterprise in case something arose that needed to be run through an enterprise. At that point there were several possibilities; the Forest Falls project might bring along possibilities or one opportunity might be translating and publishing French philosophers.

For Jonathan, the meaning of the Forest Falls project is important for setting up the business although the current business activities have nothing to do with urban planning. The story of the Forest Falls project finally clarify things for me as well linking the early plans for the business that Jonathan talked about at the beginning of the interview. Their aim was to set up a firm around the project, which further emphasizes the idea of setting up a firm to cover a need should it arise. However, to Jonathan’s disappointment there are different company spin-offs from the project although he had hoped to have one company with diverse activities. At the moment, the spin-off development makes sense to Jonathan; not to have a conglomerate involved in everything. Nevertheless, Jonathan is the project co-ordinator, which explains the project’s meaning for his business activities. As a co-ordinator Jonathan is exposed to the different needs, opportunities, and weighs the different possibilities of meeting those needs. The solutions that are based on business-type activity seem far more viable than relying on municipal decision-making. In the overall

⁸ The name of the town is fictional.

story Jonathan seems rather disillusioned with the public sector's capability of organising effectively any services, be it a university, a municipality or the day-care system. At the inception of the company, Jonathan is still a student although he is already teaching but again in the story Jonathan emphasises that the company was formed so they would be ready for the Forest Falls-project or any other need that might surface. For Jonathan the Forest Falls project is the second most important project – after entrepreneurship – in his life.

Life in the shadows of a factory

The involvement in the Forest Falls project is the result of his background. Jonathan was born in the industrialised town of Forest Falls. His father works in the paper industry and his mother is a nurse. He does not have entrepreneurs in the family but his father is positive towards entrepreneurship, 'an individualist' who is later described as an important influence. His mother is a social democrat who is afraid of all '*this entrepreneurship*', so in Jonathan's interpretation, his family is not entrepreneurially, but more socially oriented. Jonathan respects his family, especially his father – a paper machine technician - who accepted his son studying philosophy, a thing not done within that community.

And he [father] has supported all my decisions, which was exceptional then – to go study philosophy in that community, choosing that kind of direction for my studies was not awfully typical or even awfully... Father has supported all these decisions.

In this sense Jonathan's story corresponds to the views that fundamental social changes have decoupled the relationship between identity and social class and individuals are more or less 'free' to construct their own identities from the many lifestyles available (Southerton 2002, 172) whereas in the story of Arthur (6.7, p. 236), who shares a common environment with Jonathan, it is evident that he feels he was constrained by his social class and environment in his early career decisions.

The idea of setting up a company without an immediate reason intrigues me so I ask Jonathan to elaborate on this. I am really baffled with the idea that someone would establish a firm without a business idea, which makes it difficult for me to accept Jonathan's story as it is. So I ask about the impulse for establishing it and what might have been the need as I am convinced that there must have been some kind of idea behind setting up the company. Jonathan tries to accommodate his answer to my question, and he analyses the different lines that he feels were im-

portant and meaningful. First, there was Forest Falls where he realized that changes were impossible if one needed to make them through municipal decision-making systems.

You just notice that if you want to do something it is better to do it yourself rather than wait for somebody to do it for you.

For Jonathan it seems important to proactively make things happen rather than passively wait for something to happen. In a way this resonates with Rotter's locus of control theory where it is suggested that entrepreneurs perceive the outcome of an event as being within their personal control and understanding (Brockhaus et al 1982). Secondly, the economic boom at the end of the 1980s' led to the successful initiation of many start-ups so setting up a firm was a natural progression. Jonathan reveals contradictory influences on this occasion. The economic position encouraged start-ups but he later reveals that his peer group had been negative of entrepreneurship and business in general. At this occasion Jonathan is therefore referring to the media or the general public that created interest in business start-ups. The third reason is his being a teacher at the time, which is a recurring theme in Jonathan's story. As a teacher Jonathan was not able to make any tax deductions for the computers he bought which annoyed him especially as he knew that it would be possible if he had a business. This seems like a minor thing if thought about rationally but even minor issues make a difference if they are interpreted as important on the personal level. For example in Arthur's story his decision to continue his studies is attributed to being partly based on his living on the bus route to the university.

Keeping Maurice in Paris

I return to the question of having a partner, which prompts Jonathan to tell a vivid story of Maurice, his partner. In 1990 his future business partner Maurice is studying for a PhD in France but unfortunately four years had already passed and his dissertation is incomplete, which made it difficult to apply for continued financing. Maurice is not interested in returning to Finland so Jonathan and Maurice attempt to find a solution to the dilemma of how to keep Maurice in Paris. They play with the ideas introduced earlier of translating philosophers and publishing them as paperbacks and with many other ideas. It is on this occasion that Maurice's sister is offered the 1000 page computer manual to translate, which marks the beginning of the business activities. At this point of the inter-

view Jonathan suggests it may be worthwhile pursuing this issue for a while, thus underlining and the importance of this event. The manual is important not only in providing the direction for the business and ending the exploration of ideas but also the financial success is framed as important in ending an era of 'the Miserables'. They receive a good fee for the translation, which becomes an even better fee following the 20% devaluation of the mark resulting in each of them receiving 100.000 marks for the job (compare this with Rosemary's story of the devaluation 6.1.3, p. 122).

Although this is a large fee for most people, in Jonathan's story the sum is made even more important by comparing it against their other endeavours to raise money, for example, applying several times for funding from the Academy of Finland and receiving nothing. Suddenly, they receive a large sum, which marks the end of writing applications. The 100.000 marks is the 'eye opener' for Jonathan and a distinction is made between writing applications, a fruitless activity and doing a real job, a fruitful activity. Furthermore, success of the first assignment is given meaning by comparing it with the future it helps to create to the alternative future of hanging around at the university waiting for the department of computer linguistics to be set up. At the point of telling the story Jonathan knows that the department was never set up thus from the present situation it would have been a fruitless effort and Jonathan is able to congratulate himself on the decision to take another route. A decision, which has an even more lucrative outlook when compared to the university environment. The university in the story is portrayed as a rigid place where people spend their time waiting for something to happen; a place where the decision making process grinds exceedingly slowly. This is a powerful image, which helps to create the image of entrepreneurship as heaven when compared against this alternative future. In a way, therefore, Jonathan uses the university as one of the examples of the escape he made through entrepreneurship. By setting up his own enterprise he could be very pragmatic and realise some of his plans without having to wait for others to take action.

For Jonathan, therefore, the meaning of the 1000 page manual and receiving a good fee for it is manifold but most importantly it helps to create a new direction and a new personal theory for Jonathan. It marks a distinction between doing things oneself and making things happen and writing applications and waiting for something to happen. The 1000 page manual project is a transition for Jonathan. The issues that had been important before the manual were left at least partially behind as a result. The project opened a view to a new world where actors are actively in-

volved in progressing issues and where it is possible to receive attractive financial compensation for one's endeavours.

Involvement in the green movement

The story of Jonathan's working history is also a many-layered story that he starts constructing from being a child of the green movement. Within that ideological framework, being working class, having an education, intelligence, versatility and life experiences are considered important. To demonstrate these values and as a sign of the versatility and respect for the working class Jonathan also spends two years in lumber jobs and takes a carpenter's course and participates in environmental protection demonstrations. At the societal level Jonathan believes the Green movement filled the void left by the break up of the Marxist movement and he identifies with the first generation of the Greens whereas those older than him identify with the Marxist movement. This view suggests that intellectual university students should belong to an idealistic movement and the fall of the Marxist movement created space for new movements, which the Greens successfully inhabited.

Belonging to a certain social group allows Jonathan to make sense of the values he held at the time. As part of the Green movement, it was meaningful and even necessary to despise entrepreneurship and to glorify the Nordic welfare system. Therefore, in the story it also becomes necessary to detach from the group to adopt a new set of values.

Acting as a teacher

In 1987 Jonathan bought a computer, which Jonathan regards as an important event in connection with his future business. For Jonathan computers are an immediate 'click', which start to mould his life to a great extent. At the time there were not many experts in computing so it was possible to acquire skills, to rapidly become an expert and to start teaching others. Jonathan worked as a teacher of both Finnish and to a larger extent of computing in different schools and he undertook courses at the university to maintain contacts with the university. In that way if the new department were established he would be at the forefront. Currently, Jonathan's enterprise is very active in developing a new approach to translation, moving away from traditional translation, to language technology for the translation industry. The importance of a computer background for the business is made evident because their business idea is based on computerised translation and this becomes their competitive ad-

vantage, as they are able work digitally in an era where nobody else can. Although the business's activities started in 1990 Jonathan only quits his job as a teacher in the end of 1994, which in his own interpretation reveals the difficulty he had in making the transition. This is further underlined when he reveals he was being paid less as a teacher than his employees at the company suggesting that financially it would have made more sense to make the transition earlier. Mentally the security of having a job was meaningful for Jonathan '*as you always wait in case it does not work after all...*'. For Jonathan it was a long process before he reached the stage where he really believed in what he was doing and to believe that others would also believe in it. Marge, in her story (6.5, p. 202), tells about her fears of falling outside the safety nets by becoming an entrepreneur. Jonathan was trying to avoid this by keeping his teaching job.

Although he was not made redundant, it seems that dissatisfaction with organisational life was an important factor in Jonathan becoming an entrepreneur. Jonathan worked as a teacher in the early 1990s. At that time the public sector was forced to make major cuts in spending. For Jonathan his professional reference group was teachers and he paints the 'future horror' by describing the atmosphere as a battle between teachers and the tightening financial situation, which results in several meetings where everybody had to portray themselves as 'irreplaceable members' of the community. This story is parallel to the story of Marge where a similar image of an organizational battle is depicted. Although Jonathan refutes the idea that he feared being made redundant because his orientation in computers made him a valuable commodity, it nevertheless provided him with a glimpse of his potential future if he remained in teaching.

A 25-year-old-chick comes in her high-heels to explain how the school needs to be run.

The negative future picture for Jonathan is therefore, firstly, being told how to teach and run the school, whereby the responsibility and evaluation of his activities would lie outside himself and secondly, that control and advice comes from a much younger and perhaps less competent person. In the story the notions of 'a chick' and 'high heels' serve to describe the person as incompetent. The image is clearly feminine suggesting that teaching is becoming a dominantly female profession but it could also suggest that it is easier to describe the incompetence through usage of a feminine image rather than a male one. Nevertheless, through the images of the battlefield and chicks that give orders, the option of re-

remaining in teaching is seen as undesirable, which helps to make the entrepreneurship route more attractive.

At the end of 1994 Jonathan finally quits teaching but the decision is influenced by the school principal's input. Jonathan is still interested in waiting for another year but the principal suggests that it is better to make the decision now. This demonstrates how difficult it can be to make the final decision to leave the safety net and become fully employed in one's own business as Jonathan clings onto it as long as possible.

6.2.4 Doing well financially but struggling with human relations

Jonathan starts to answer my question about the problems regarding entrepreneurship by describing the start-up phase of the second enterprise in 1993, which was launched in the middle of the deepest recession. Their fees were the same as they were in the boom years so the business was thriving. This suggests that economic recession does not necessarily affect all enterprises in a similar way but due to high business standards or existing contracts a particular company may even benefit from the situation. Thus, Jonathan makes a distinction between the economic and financial problems that would have created most difficulties for entrepreneurs managing a business in the 1990's in Finland and the actual difficulties he faced. Jonathan begins to discuss the issues that in reality were problematic in the entrepreneurship. For example, having another job while being an entrepreneur was difficult because his teaching job suffered. However, he advises others interested in becoming entrepreneurs who have the option of remaining in their current posts to do so, which is explained by not having to step into thin air (i.e. falling outside the safety net). Jonathan enjoyed his teaching job but relations at work were strained by his extra curricula activities as an entrepreneur. However, it seems that Jonathan relates this problem more from the school's point-of-view and partly from his personal abashment of taking time and effort from the school to work on his own business. Although he was physically present, he felt his mind was sometimes elsewhere. As an entrepreneur it is however an advantage to have an alternative source of income, which he recommends to others as well. This reveals the dichotomy of Jonathan's position. As a teacher being an entrepreneur is disadvantageous, however as an entrepreneur, having an alternative source of income i.e. being a teacher is an advantage.

Then Jonathan returns to the good financial situation '*It is funny - as long as you try to keep returns bigger than the expenses...*' suggesting that it is relatively easy to take care of the finances of the company ne-

cessitating only basic mathematics even though the industry does not enjoy big margins (See also Timothy's story 6.6, p. 217). Success is based more on the 'love for the industry' and not on trying to remunerate oneself although a prosperous future is painted in the story: 'Still the pay day will come'. This position can be explained through the transitions the business underwent. The business was created to solve a problem for a friend and to generate as much money as possible collectively for the group of friends involved. The business environment is based on enjoyment of the business not on financial remuneration, which have remained low, however it is depicted that financial success and benefits are also possible. This suggests that the measures of success do not remain stable in the story or in entrepreneurship.

Jonathan's biggest problems however are with the human relations within the company: Firstly, working together places strain on the friendships. Money is always a topic that causes friction within the company. Furthermore, like Jonathan, his friends were also employed elsewhere adding to the difficulties that emerged. Secondly, there was the case of an employee whose actions caused Jonathan a great deal of stress and who subsequently had to be dismissed. I asked Jonathan to elaborate on this issue:

This was a hectic time for the business and we had three people working for us. We tried to grow all the time but at the same time we subcontracted work out. We had a very good person coordinating different kinds of texts, and at this point there were too many texts from the EU, or not too much, but (s)he⁹ wanted to read all of them and even translate most of them. Then without warning, (s)he just lost his/her nerve and (s)he just informed the EU that we were not taking any more projects and in addition (s)he was taking sick leave because of burnout. I came home from Forest Falls with my family and there was just a note that this had happened and that a lawyer would contact us regarding compensation for overtime and unpaid pension payments.

The story is very concrete, easily related and paints a vivid image of a family coming home from visiting relatives and of Jonathan's shock to find out what has happened during his absence. Jonathan takes this episode very personally and experiences infirmity and powerlessness as things are being pushed in his face and there is nothing he can do. He reacts emotionally to this event 'it is funny how as an entrepreneur one is

⁹ The Finnish language is not able to differentiate between he and she but uses 'hän' for both sexes.

more of, it sometimes feels that one is more of a poet than an entrepreneur'. Business and rational thinking are set aside and emotions come to the fore *'if somebody wants to argue, let's argue then'*. This supports the view that it is not only the rational or the emotional, but the fusion of the two in a manner where one cannot exist without the other, that serves as the basis for decision-making in small businesses (Carr 2001, 421). This situation was difficult and there were few options to solve it so Jonathan took the first option available, a dismissal based on reduced work¹⁰ although he knew there was sufficient work to employ someone in that position. This event is described as a difficult decision and solving it through a dismissal created a new problem: not being allowed to hire a new employee for six months. Jonathan is a bit hesitant to talk about the event due to the illegality of the action but he defends the decision as being the only possible solution. The image portrayed is that he had his back against the wall with no where to go yet he needed to resolve the situation somehow. The framing of the decision as the only solution available and that it was an emotional burden for Jonathan helps to dilute the degree of its illegality in the story.

The story of the management problems continues. The growth of the business has created a company, which is now 'big business'. Jonathan attributes this as the reason for the difficulties in managing the company. He also argues that that the complaints they have recently had are a direct result of the company's growth because it was an unknown phenomenon in the company previously. The image of the smoothly running company being disrupted by rapid growth is further intensified by the notion that they had not lost any customers during the previous seven years of existence. As they have now lost one major customer it is made sense through the growth and related management problems.

Jonathan accepts responsibility for the problems the company has experienced. His personal flaws are not being able to tackle the human and management issues in the growing company but he tries to counteract this by identifying and excelling at development and technology issues. This image is generalised as something universal to certain kinds of entrepreneurs. They are good at something but not necessarily skilled in leadership. He enjoys entrepreneurship but the human resources issues are not his forte even positive issues such as the recruitment process and having meetings. Although it is important for a person to portray himself or her-

¹⁰ In Finland, the law regarding dismissals is a strict one; If the dismissal is being done on the basis of reduced work then the company cannot employ a new person during the following 6 months without first enquiring whether the person dismissed is interested in accepting the job.

self as a good person Jonathan can admit his inferiority in one particular area by suggesting that he has skills elsewhere.

Then Jonathan says hesitantly that the lack of freetime is sometimes unpleasant but then contradicts this observation saying '*but because this appears so late on my list it shows that it is not the world's most important issue anyway...*'. I wonder whether his family or wife think it is a problem and I ask Jonathan whether the lack of freetime is raised at home (see also my similar questions to Timothy and Samuel to demonstrate my perspective). Jonathan confirms my supposition '*that it is unpleasant and it always causes discussions at home*'. This construction suggests that at least partially the unpleasantness of not having freetime is directly connected to the quarrels or debates it causes at home and not so much to Jonathan's desire to have more freetime. Jonathan then engages in a story where his presence in the family and at home is described. He has been working from the company office for only the past six months, previously he worked mainly from home. In the mornings Jonathan worked letting the children sleep as long as they wanted to, then Jonathan fed them and took them to the kindergarten before continuing his work. The children also had access to his office.

They can in principle come here and they do in fact, for example when I'm still working, they come here to play video games and what ever they do, they come, learn to write. Although I'm working I am in fact also present - at least somewhat. Not completely present but anyway. I do not see the quality of time problem to be a major one, maybe someone else would, but I don't.

In the quote Jonathan seems to negotiate (with his wife?) between his presence and absence for the children when working at his office and the children coming to play there. The story is part of the explanation for why the lack of freetime is not a real problem for Jonathan although it causes some friction with his wife. Even though he is working, Jonathan believes that simply being present with the children is sufficient. The degree of his presence is however being negotiated in the story. At the end of the story Jonathan advocates his point-of-view but acknowledges that there might be other counterviews. The family story is therefore present in Jonathan's story but unlike in the stories of Rosemary, Marge and especially Diane, Jonathan does not automatically express the need to ground his decisions on the entrepreneurship side by relating managing entrepreneurship to his personal family life. It was only my question that led him to tell the story of how the children could visit him in the office. This passage also demonstrates my sensitivity to the issue: I hear the

women talk about their families and how entrepreneurship is managed in the family context so I want raise this issue with the men although I realise that they would not naturally discuss family issues at length when talking about their entrepreneurship.

6.2.5 Preparing for sharing of wisdom

The story of the future deals with two separate stories, that of the business and of Jonathan's personal story. Jonathan gets carried away as he starts talking about the potential of the business, about the transfer away from translation into the language technology and translation industry. Jonathan identifies many opportunities that could be translated into growth opportunities for the company. The future of the business is however separated from his personal future. The destinies of the company and Jonathan are not totally intertwined. He feels that he has given ten full years to the business and at some point, at the age of 45, he will be chairman of the board or take a diminishing role in the company by forming a small subsidiary to the company or sell it altogether. He does not make it clear in the interview how this will be carried out in practice. After Maurice left the business Jonathan has not found a new 'right hand' who could take major responsibility for the company although he says he is constantly on the lookout. The difficulty of finding a suitable person is explained by the prerequisite qualities the person would need, i.e. being able to understand the financial and profitability issues whilst at the same time excelling in organisational skills. The vagueness of Jonathan's answer invites me to ask further questions about his strategy regarding his withdrawal from the company. Again I am not willing to accept Jonathan's vague ideas but I need some concrete facts and figures to convince me of his plans. One possibility Jonathan raises is having a smaller company in order to eliminate or reduce the leadership and human resource problem or alternatively, concentrating on the development issues by renouncing the possibility of retiring altogether. At this point Jonathan refers to Plato's development theory that at the age of 50 one is supposed to start educating youth and sharing experience. It seems that the theory is applied to convince me of the endeavour although vague at the time and it is supported by higher thinking in order to underline it is something which is both feasible and worth aspiring to.

6.2.6 Important people for entrepreneurship

To my question of the important people who influenced his entrepreneurship Jonathan replies that he has been particularly supported by his father, who backed his unconventional solutions and he has also received support from the women in his family and from his close friends. In addition, Jonathan states that the travelling preachers, like the philosopher Esa Saarinen, have been somewhat influential although he does not explain in what way. The people are listed in a way that suggests he drew up a list as a result of my introductory letter. It appears that he then considered the list and decided which people he would discuss in the interview. This indicates that my letter can be applied as a resource in telling the story. Jonathan introduces another important influence but this influence is negative. He talks about his association with the Green movement where entrepreneurship was portrayed as negative and senseless activities that were interesting only to the brainless:

It is not altogether without meaning that I realized that goddamnit, I have been, we've been totally wrong. And the others even more wrong than I. Then one starts to pursue things that one was not allowed to do before, in a decent way.

It is in this story the group is presented as a sort of a cult where the divisions between right and wrong are clear-cut and strong and not providing many opportunities for the individuals belonging to the group to do things freely and independently. In the story Jonathan strongly renounces the views of the group which allows him to do something new and formerly forbidden. In order to act as an entrepreneur with a new set of values, he has to distance himself from his former peer group and its values, which is underlined in the story.

He continues his story of influential people by identifying the lack of particular mentors in his entrepreneurship. His maturity (being over 30) and his feeling of security at the time he launched the business are given as reasons to explain his lack of need for a mentor. He then however contradicts his story of not having experienced the need for a mentor by claiming to have needed one many times. Overall, the story of the mentors, which Jonathan raises himself, is interesting suggesting that the overall concept of the need for nascent entrepreneurs to have a mentor is gradually becoming a common rule or way of acting. Not needing a mentor is however explained by the community of translators, which is depicted as amicable, easy to get along with, where one is not expected to

be good at small talk or dress properly. Within the community expertise is appreciated at the expense of politeness or gallantry.

6.2.7 Enjoying the pragmatism of entrepreneurial life

The story of computers – an empiricist surfaces in Jonathan

Jonathan starts telling a story of the enjoyment he derives from entrepreneurship and computers. In general computers make it possible to verify immediately whether something works or not. The idea of immediate testing related to computers is distinguished from the earlier philosophical debates dealing with years of meetings and discussions he undertook in his former role as a teacher. The discussions are described as important but they left him feeling frustrated, as they never generated results or conclusions on the issues being discussed. For Jonathan the pragmatism related to working with computers is a source of gratification, which he did not obtain in his previous role. The joys of working with computers are also described as having had an influence on his identity; the non-empiricist becomes an empiricist enjoying experimenting. The enjoyment comes from seeing things being finished and done with as opposed to being caught in the endless conversations and discussions. It is also connected to the challenges of the business; things that are on the verge of impossibility are finished on schedule and in good quality. Jonathan implies that it is the visibility and the speed of the work that fascinates him.

Then a big breakthrough – it links to our success – we made a client's connections work for the first time – we had done a few other things like it – but this was in the premises of the customer, it was nothing [new]; the equipment had been developed for the connections already but there were dozens of people looking at it, that goddamnit those [guys] are doing it, those Finns have made the connection work! Previously, there were always ten couriers a day to take parcels in and out but then all of them gradually started to use the system we had developed and cued up for our equipment... that we had developed something that was clearly something, well, clearly something new.

In the story the joy of being able to make something work is further intensified by having others come firstly to wonder at it and secondly to make use of it. Jonathan explains why he derives enjoyment from working and playing with computers by relaying a friend's theory of men: when a man turns 30 he needs a car or a gadget to work with, until that

age artistic films and good books have been enough. Thus, his interest in computers is made sense of through generalising it to all men. Then, the pragmatism is described as a joy that those studying humanities miss in their education and lives – the humanities culture is described using the previous university example of things dragging on for 10 to 15 years without any immediate results. Jonathan applies my background as counterforce in the story to emphasise the problems of the humanities discipline and purports the business school as a place where students are praised for being achieving results and focus on getting things done. The business school is presented as a success culture, something that is missing from the humanities. Jonathan describes his own role in developing the new culture by providing employment for the graduates of humanities and therefore providing them with the means to be a part of the visible success culture. Jonathan states that this development role is one he enjoys very much.

The most rewarding aspect of entrepreneurship for Jonathan is the opportunities the business offers through technology. It provides a huge amount of opportunities that Jonathan intends to grasp. The source of his joy is noticing that a particular service is missing, that there is an identified need for it and somebody must be the first to do it.

Social meanings of money

Jonathan moves to the next rewarding moment and tells the story of the company's financial success. The first big project is a financial success, which is contrasted to the previous years of being a poor student and just barely making ends meet. In Jonathan's story the meaning of the financial success is emphasised by recounting a story where his partner is in an even worse financial condition than he is.

My pal was even more so, he was always ... when we went to a pub he would say 'give me ten marks so I can buy a beer, I'll manage then, there are a lot of familiar girls and others here, who will buy me more drinks' [with a husky voice]. All that 'les Miserables' culture that was so... You can see it in Maurice more than in me - like it's nice to go skiing in Nice or so...

The meaning of money is therefore not of just enjoying the money as such but it is compared with his previous life; of not having any money at all, being forced to scrape together the necessary coins to go to a restaurant, to the movies or for a pint.

Maurice is used as an example of someone who lives from hand to mouth for many years, then receives money that marks a life transition from the 'Miserables' to the life of the 'Bold and the Beautiful' taking great pleasure in enjoying the money available and the things that can be done with it.

Probing other options

Jonathan feels that his entrepreneurship is intellectually more challenging than for example engineering types of entrepreneurship. He feels that he has the prerequisite skills to work in an industrial company with potential environmental problems. This is in contrast with his previous concerns for the environment when he was a member of the Green movement. Jonathan refuses the idea of an industrial company due to intellectual, not ethical reasons. This underlines his detachment from his old values and the group.

The joy of entrepreneurship is further made sense through Jonathan's reluctance of working for someone else, which he explains by his lack of interest in being a part of an organization, and he wonders why so many people feel the need to belong to a group or organisation. Jonathan states he could become a consultant once he gives up his current role but in practice only on part-time basis, as he cannot think of anything more interesting than his current business. This makes me wonder why he plans to withdraw from the business at the age of 45? Is it really about leaving the business altogether or more about trying to find a solution to reduce his managerial responsibilities and to concentrate more on the technological side? His future career options are however narrowed because the firm provides employment for so many people, which Jonathan advocates is the reason he cannot close the company. The idea of social and ethical responsibility towards the employees is similar in the stories of Rosemary and Arthur that contrast with the functionalist views of entrepreneurship being simply about making profit. Selling the company is an option if he can find a buyer for it. He cannot consider, however, remaining in the company as an employee once it is sold due to the fear of losing the freedom gained and receiving orders from someone else. The question of freedom is taken up and emphasised in the other stories of entrepreneurs in this study. For Jonathan, freedom is about making the decisions himself and not being told from outside what to do and how to do it.

6.2.8 Changing values and views

By becoming an entrepreneur Jonathan says he has adopted new ideas and values, changing from a green to neo-liberal and distanced himself from what he once believed was right and from his peer group at that time. A similar struggle between the identities can be seen in the story of Marge. However the difference in Jonathan's story is that the transition from a defender of the welfare society to an entrepreneur necessitated an important change of values and views. Jonathan renounced his previous identity whereas Marge aims to balance the two identities of a journalist and an entrepreneur. Although Jonathan describes the change as being fundamental he still considers some of the characteristics linked with the welfare society, such as schools, libraries and popular education as being important.

It is not only Jonathan who has changed but he notes a sharp change in the general climate towards entrepreneurs and also to other issues, like the EU. Although the climate is more entrepreneurially friendly as a neo-liberal of today Jonathan wonders about the rigidity of the systems, for example why all the day care centres are open from nine to five and not flexibly according to the needs of families. From the neoliberalism point-of-view Jonathan also addresses the question of public and private producers of services and refers to the old system where companies needed to withdraw from all areas where there were public producers, which he himself now sees completely from the opposite point of view. However, the dilemma between the old and the new persists in his social encounters as most of his friends are still leftists so he needs to discuss issues like whether it is exploitation to buy services from Russia because the prices paid there are lower than in Finland. Although empathising with his friends' thoughts because previously he shared their opinion he now considers it to be acceptable and the right thing to do. This example serves to demonstrate and make visible the changes that have taken place in his values and ideas.

In principle Jonathan celebrates the idea of having a lot of entrepreneurs. There are, however, many industries that are not really profitable where the life-style entrepreneurs have a lower standard of living than the wage earners. On the other hand, the Nokia model with the subcontracting companies has so far been a successful one, which serves as an example of the lucrative side of entrepreneurship. In Jonathan's story he paints the images of different entrepreneurs rather than telling a story of all entrepreneurs in general. There are the lifestyle entrepreneurs who might be profitable, such as small shop owners and the like but the busi-

nesses have not changed their original business ideas during the past 20 years. There are the great majority of entrepreneurs who own companies that employ less than two to three employees and have no ambitions to grow the company. Jonathan compares their way of acting to that of the wage earners: *'they are interested in taking all holidays'*. In a way by painting this picture of the non-growth oriented, non-ambitions entrepreneurs working in quiet back waters Jonathan adds to his own image – he is growth-oriented and ambitious in terms of developing his business idea.

6.2.9 Discussion on Jonathan's entrepreneurial identity

In Jonathan's story the role of identity transformations is the key. First, although being born in an industrialised region to a normal middle-class family he chooses the 'abnormal' and goes to study philosophy at university and gets involved in the Green Movement sharing many of the leftist ideas. Second, through appreciation for the meaningful and pragmatic he turns into an entrepreneur with neoliberal ideas. In the story he distances himself from alternative futures by constructing them as highly un lucrative options. The university is described as a rigid, stale place that is slow and largely incapable of making any (right) decisions. The school environment is described as a battlefield where the members engage in improving their own importance in the community as opposed to doing something meaningful. The construction of these alternative futures as unattractive ones helps to create meaning for his current entrepreneurship, which is the escape route from the horrors of the two other worlds.

The initial business transaction is presented as a result of pure chance, an assignment that drops in their lap. However, it is interwoven with other projects in Jonathan's life that could have as well provided the basis for the company, such as the Forest Falls project in urban planning or translating and publishing French philosophers. The assignment of translating a computer manual forms the basis for the current business activities; it is the starting point.

The first assignment turns out to be a success in many ways. It is mirrored against the other attempts that are being described as fruitless endeavours of just writing applications and being poor thus underlining the meaning of the success as a life-changing event for Jonathan. For Jonathan it is important to make things happen and act proactively rather than wait for somebody else to act, which also creates the role for Jonathan as an entrepreneur: it is about making things happen. Computers are also important for Jonathan – the technology allows him to enjoy the prag-

matic aspects of business: trying things out rather than engaging in endless discussions. Jonathan identifies as a technology and development oriented entrepreneur, which helps him to counterbalance his flaws as an entrepreneur, those of not being fully capable of taking care of the human relations and management side of the business.

By becoming an entrepreneur Jonathan has to renounce his previous ideals and ideas and to distance himself from the old peer group. In order to act as an entrepreneur Jonathan needs to make visible the ways his values and ideas have changed. Yet, the foundation for his activities was already set at home – an individualist father who permitted his son to find his way act as a source of faith and confidence. Therefore, these many elements help to cast the stereotypical entrepreneur in a new light – a green philosopher turning into a neo-liberal entrepreneur. This adds to our understanding of the constructive nature of our identities.

6.3 Eliza's story

Eliza (age 37) designs scarves and ties as high-quality and expensive business gifts. She works as a sole entrepreneur but there are two sales persons that sell her products on commission that she connects to her business. The company has a turnover of approximately 160.000 Euros.

6.3.1 Presenting the Scene

It is Rosemary (6.1, p. 115) who suggests that I should also interview Eliza, one of her mentees. I decide to follow her advice and I call Eliza to set up a meeting. We decide to meet at the Female Business Club's premises, which is a relief as I know my way there and I can easily and vividly imagine the interview setting. This time I do not have any prior engagements in the city so I am on time, relaxed and comfortable before the interview. When meeting with Eliza I assume that she is not much older than I am (31) and in the interview she turns out to be 37. Although age is not always a sufficient condition for finding common ground, often it helps to democratise the interview situation. After the interview I write in my notes that the interview went quite nicely 'it being already my third and Eliza being young'.

Eliza is a fast speaker so she interrupts my questions quite often and starts answering them prior to me finishing them. In the beginning of the interview Eliza very quickly summarises the events that preceded the start-up, first experimenting with entrepreneurship, second working in a

family business gaining the necessary skills and a growing discomfort towards working in an organisation, which lead to her starting up a new business. To make these stories richer and fuller I encourage Eliza to revisit the phases and themes she introduced. There are not many thinking pauses in the interview, her story is quite determined and delivered without any chattering or prattling. On the other hand, there are several passages in the story where meanings attached to concepts and themes are considered, such as mentoring and whether Eliza accepts the role or not, whether her gender influenced a particular problem she encountered, without any firm resolution or conclusion of the matters.

Eliza applies different strategies of constructing the story to make it more believable and credible. She frequently uses generalizations '*all the entrepreneurs that I've talked to*' and gives a lot of examples to strengthen her claims. Often a double construction is provided as the chain of evidence to support and underline the truthfulness of a claim: an example dealing with entrepreneurs in general is supported by her personal experience.

Later in the interview I learn that she has been involved in various training sessions and told her story many times. After the interview, unlike Jonathan's story, I feel that overall there were not that many elements in the story. In addition, I keep noticing that the story is framed against the common knowledge and understanding developed in entrepreneurship literature and research and they are taken as points in the story. The most memorable story is Eliza's personal theory of the 'lazy entrepreneur' to which she identifies herself, and it is on this occasion where the myths and common beliefs of entrepreneurs are rejected and an alternative approach towards entrepreneurship is taken.

Eliza's story is very unlike the other female stories because it is not framed against her family story. In fact in the interview she does not mention a partner or any children and the only references to a family are made towards her childhood family. I deduce from this that she does not have any family in the sense that the others have and it is interesting to read and listen to her story, which is so different in this respect. It makes me wonder whether '*...women suffer from the huge disadvantage of not having a wife to take care of them and their children*' (Marlow 2002, 86), which would suggest that the female vs. male dichotomy should be split into four quadrants: female and male with families and without them while investigating lives and stories of the members in the quadrants in their professional arenas.

6.3.2 Accidental designer

Eliza starts her story of entrepreneurship with a note on common knowledge and research about entrepreneurship – that most entrepreneurs have a long history of entrepreneurs in the family, which contradicts her own story of coming from a normal middleclass family. During the school holidays she worked in cafés etc. underlining the point that she was not particularly entrepreneurial and was not exposed to entrepreneurship but rather was on the normal track. Based on her understanding of a typical background for entrepreneurs she describes her choice of a career as something rather unexpected and paradoxical.

Eliza says she never meant to enter the field of textile work, as she was poor at textile work although excelling at drawing. Eliza says she simply drifted into the business. The drifting takes place in two phases. In the first phase Eliza graduates from high-school with a desire to become a nurse or a medical doctor but when she is not accepted into these schools she ends up in a handicraft school without knowing exactly what it is about. She goes to have a look and although being surprised and terrified that the school deals with textile work '*the subject I specifically did not want to take*' she, however, graduates from the school. In the second phase she is accepted into the University of Art and Design in Helsinki on her third year of applying, but not in the clothes' design department where she originally thought of applying '*because everybody wants to become a clothes designer at that age*' but she is accepted in the textile work department.

Curiously enough Eliza's story echoes my own story of drifting into research (1.1, p. 13). In our stories we are both totally confident of the one field we would never enter, however, it becomes exactly the field we land in. Both of our stories seem to provide similar reasoning behind the unthinkable options – for Eliza it is being poor at textile work at school that leads her to perceive the option of choosing textile work career as something unthinkable. It was struggling with a Master's thesis that made me believe that clearly I am not apt towards a research career. Our perceptions of our capabilities, strengths and weaknesses seem to have developed quite early and quickly in the educational environment. We both interpret the situation in the same way: we are self-evidently and inevitably poor at the respective areas without much questioning or doubting. Later, however, another opportunity presents itself and although it seems an impossible route or option given our experiences and our perceptions of our capabilities, we choose to have a go at it. The experiment then provides us with successful results as we receive good feedback and our

confidence regarding our competences in the given areas starts to rebuild. In our stories our career choice is framed as a bizarre move towards something quite unthinkable but the good end outcome transform it into a sensible move.

6.3.3 Experimenting with entrepreneurship

During her university years Eliza starts working as a free-lancer selling models and finally she sets up a firm with her student colleague in 1988.

As a student I started to do freelance work, that is selling models. I was totally 'green' [inexperienced] and I just started selling hideous models, but I learned a lot at the same time what I have later understood as a really necessary experience for an entrepreneur - to tolerate criticism.

Selling 'hideous' models as a freelancer is framed as a learning experience for acquiring necessary work experience to act as an entrepreneur in a later phase. At the time it may have been difficult for Eliza to accept the negative feedback but in retrospect it is important for her to have been able to listen to it and to learn from it rather than to dismiss it purely as bad-mouthing or as a personal insult. Through narrative it is possible to give new and different meanings to past experiences. Negative experiences, such as bad feedback and harsh criticism, can be given a new positive meaning of learning.

In this quote from Eliza's life-story time is present in the 'then', 'later' and 'now' structure of the narrative and hence we are taken to meet the Eliza back then (protagonist 1) who Eliza of the now (the narrator) portrays as a slightly foolish, but courageous student who went around selling awful designs. Then Eliza introduces us to the Eliza (protagonist 2) who realises that this experience of selling bad designs and getting bad feedback was an important learning experience for the narrator – a successful designer and owner of her company. In the social identity and sociological subject discussion it is emphasised that the identity is constructed in relation to meaningful others and, therefore, it is necessary for people to portray themselves in a positive light to their audiences (Hall S. 1999, 22). However, in the quote above Eliza portrays herself as a 'bad designer'. It seems that in retrospect it is possible to make fun or even ridicule oneself and in fact, the portrayal of the past identity as a 'bad designer' could therefore serve the purpose of portraying the current identity as a 'good one'. The learning that has taken place in between these different identity constructions (the narrator and the protagonists) is the

key. By claiming that one has not been so competent before may reinforce the professional entrepreneur image of today, as it is possible to understand the difference through development and learning. In fact, the construction of the person (the 'I') as someone who has always been good and professional would imply that no development or learning has taken place and the person is as ignorant in the business as at the beginning.

Although narratives are imposed to set order and make sense of the events, they are not without paradox and contradiction. Eliza's story continues in the following manner (taken directly after the quote before):

Well, yes, I guess it was sort of entrepreneurial to go around as a freelancer. And from that I got the idea along with a school friend to set up – when the sales were very good, I sold quite nicely - to set up a firm.

In the previous quote the models were presented as awful yet she says they sold quite or even very well. Of course, we could assume that the buyers were fooled by her and bought the models although in reality they were bad. Or, the self-mockery could be seen as a democratising strategy: the entrepreneur in the interview is the expert and I am the ignorant doctoral student and, therefore, self-mockery is applied to democratise the situation (Dyer – Keller-Cohen 2000, 298). Furthermore, this contradiction (bad models – good sales) together with the humorous Don Quixote image of Eliza going around as a young, green student trying desperately to sell the models could be seen as a way to emphasise the contrast between the 'young, inexperienced, foolish Eliza' and the current 'professional, top class designer Eliza' for the benefit of the latter (For further studies of analysing humour/irony and contrast/contradiction/ see e.g. Collinson 1988, Hatch – Ehrlich 1993, Hatch 1997, Colston – O'Brien 2000).

The first round of being in business, the experimenting phase, is portrayed as a form of playing by making a comparison with the serious business of today. The two partners were engaged in play, which is made visible by a concrete example - finding a nice name for the company was the only difficult obligation the two could think of. Eliza and her partner worked together in the company for about a year with the idea of coordinating their work (Eliza as a fabric designer and her partner as a clothes' designer) but the joint-business comes to end when Eliza buys the partner out of the company because their idea does not seem to work in Finland. Eliza then works alone for about six months doing fairly good business and making a living out of it.

6.3.4 Working in the family business

At this point of her career Eliza goes to visit the TextileCo¹¹ to sell some of her models and learns that the company is organising a design competition to recruit a new designer. First Eliza rejects the idea of going to work for somebody because her business is prospering providing her with a living and an enjoyable life. However, Eliza is selected to work in the company although she herself still ponders and struggles whether it is really something she wants to do. Eliza shadows her own role in the process by applying a passive tone and the image given is that she was employed partly against her will and she still cherishes the idea of running for her own business. This construction together with the previous play-like image of entrepreneurship could be seen as ways of making sense of turning down an entrepreneurial career, especially since working at TextileCo proves not to be heaven on earth for her. In the company she is frustrated with the nine to five day schedule and with the problems, which arise from working for an employer.

It was good schooling in itself, in that one learned a new profession but also what it is like to work for another. And especially if you're a designer, t what it is to go and work from nine to five in front of the computer. So it was a good experience in itself. (Eliza)

In addition, Eliza emphasises that working as a designer in a family business is not unproblematic but she learns what it really is about. Although it is a positive experience in terms of learning new skills and a profession, Eliza is frustrated with many things. The work environment leaves a lot to be desired resulting in a chaotic turnover of people. The Mrs. of the firm is a celebrated legend in the business although from Eliza's point-of-view the story is very different.

And the Mrs. herself who had no designer-education, who... So, there are the legendary stories that here comes a business graduate and starts designing and 'wow'. The reality is always that behind the businessperson you'll find a quiet designer, who does the job and never gets any praise or recognition for it. It was so in this case. And then I was there. I was sort of the first employed designer, who went there as an official designer so there were problems with the ageing owner and the designer. (The owner) wants to retire and notices it's not so nice to retire when somebody comes who knows the job and all this...

¹¹ The name of the company is fictional.

Although negative in at least two respects – the tight daily working hours and problems with employee status - Eliza constructs the experience of working in the company as a meaningful learning experience; ‘a good schooling’. She gets the opportunity to acquire a new skill and profession at the company, which is very important because her former profession becomes extinct in Finland (as many Finnish companies relocate their production outside the country as a part of the restructuring of the textile industry). Later in the interview I ask Eliza to tell more about the problems related to working for an employer:

*It was you know **phew** I have been working for two different family businesses and I have come across the same things in both of them so that...It is the bad sides of family businesses, somebody could do a good PhD on them, **laughing** but there I learned, that it was a good coincidence in itself that I went there.*

From the quote a similar construction to her previous experience can be seen: the experience of working in a family business is interpreted as a negative one by Eliza, but she portrays it as a meaningful experience to have learned the new skill. In order to convey the seriousness of the problems in family businesses and of her complaint Eliza applies two different legitimising strategies. Firstly, she uses the generalisation – the fact that she has been working in two family businesses with the same problems suggests that these problems can be found in any family business and, therefore, her complaint about the problems is a legitimate one. Secondly, Eliza’s comment that somebody could do a good PhD on the problems in family businesses suggests that there are in fact problems in family businesses that can be identified and proven with a study, and the problems are big enough to be a basis for a good PhD.

6.3.5 Going for the 2nd Round: Serious about entrepreneurship

This talk around working for employment hints at Eliza's next move and in 1998 she quits the company and sets up a new enterprise of her own, relying on her professional skills and her handwork as a designer that were appreciated in the previous job. This decision, going into entrepreneurship for the second time, is now constructed against the working life experiences Eliza has had – she has experience both from the freedom that comes with earning a living as an entrepreneur and the difficulties of working for employer and in the story freedom wins. At this point Eliza

makes her way to the Female Business Club¹² as she wants to learn the basics of entrepreneurship, to get serious about it as opposed to the earlier entrepreneurship, which she portrayed as playing, although she had a bookkeeper who took care of the legal obligations so playing is not parallel with being illegal.

I ask Eliza about the meaningful experiences or events before and during entrepreneurship. Eliza starts to answer by saying that only a few entrepreneurs seek the entrepreneurial career that she follows and supports. She reaches this conclusion following discussions she has had with many entrepreneurs at the Female Business Club. Hence, the generalisation strategy is applied to legitimise her claim. According to Eliza most entrepreneurs just drift into entrepreneurship due to unemployment or due to an opportunity that presents itself where one has to consider whether to give the idea away or to set up a firm. To support her idea that entrepreneurs do not actively seek the career she takes herself as an example and lists the items in the chain of evidence: From having a poor mark in textile work to going to the home economics school and further to the university of arts and design, learning to know a little bit of what it is like to be an entrepreneur when working as a freelancer, working for another company and noticing the problems of working from nine to five but acquiring a new profession that gives her a foundation for entrepreneurship. After the disillusionment of TextileCo that led to her finding something new Eliza says she primarily had two alternatives because *‘at the time there were no IT companies yet, that I could have gone in one, of course.’* Had they existed the IT companies are presented as a natural third alternative but given the circumstances her alternatives were limited to becoming an entrepreneur or a teacher. The proposition of going to the IT industry is a curious and surprising one but tells something about the image and partly the reality of the IT field: for a while it was considered to provide opportunities for practically anyone or at least for creative people who could easily enter into the business (see also Timothy’s story as an IT entrepreneur 6.6, p. 217). Of the remaining options becoming a teacher does not appeal to Eliza. She finds teaching fun and she identifies herself as a good teacher, but as a teacher she would be working from nine to five and repeating the same things year after year. Therefore, her options are limited to becoming an entrepreneur. Eliza frames the decision to become an entrepreneur as a realistic option meaning that she tries it out to see whether she succeeds or not. The realism is thus given the meaning of also accepting the possibility of failure and the decision is not calculated as totally safe as there are few safety nets. The main

¹² The name is fictional.

strength for Eliza is, however, counting on her handwork as a designer. In addition, the lack of any major investments facilitates the decision.

To my question of the meaningful events and experiences which influenced her, Eliza narrates a story of becoming an entrepreneur through a chain of accidents and entering the field to experiment, not striving for it systematically and making calculations. The story suggests that there are no meaningful events that would have influenced her becoming an entrepreneur.

Her business form is a sole trader¹³, not a limited company although this option is often considered but Eliza's bookkeeper has assured her with calculations that it is an illusion that a limited company would be better especially as her customers do not bother about it. Eliza then starts to talk about her working from an office at home. Linking the business and the home office is a way for Eliza to say that she is not really concerned about the external appearances of the firm. She likes to work from home and even when she previously had an office she would go there every morning and wait until she felt she could go home to work. Working in an office does not suit her, which can be seen as a continuation of her discomfort of working in the family businesses. In Eliza's story therefore the negative side of working alone is not touched upon as in the story of Diane (6.4, p. 182) which could be explained by her willingness to leave home to enjoy social contacts that form the basis of her entrepreneurial life.

6.3.6 Life as an entrepreneur

To my query regarding encouraging or depressing events as an entrepreneur she replies by quoting another entrepreneur:

Well, I have the opinion that – there is Sally Smith [another entrepreneur] who always says that 'A business for sale for one mark' - day.

Although my question deals both with the positive and the negative sides of entrepreneurship Eliza starts to answer with the negative sides which is the last part of my question. In the answer it is considered important for an entrepreneur to feel discouraged, ready to give in from time to time whereas being overconfident is built as a negative characteristic for an entrepreneur because it raises the prospect of a fear of falling from too high. For an entrepreneur therefore it is necessary to be alert and humble and that can be achieved by dealing with an empty order

¹³ In Finnish: toiminimi.

book or other discouragements every now and then. It is this ideal picture of an entrepreneur, which she has constructed, that Eliza tries to live up to in her story.

Eliza then turns to the first part of my question and recounts that the mentoring project has pushed her forward faster than she would have gone on her own. For example, the contacts she has developed when discussing the mentoring project in various occasions, these are not necessarily business contacts but they are construed as important and rewarding, which might also provide some business opportunities. This cue leads Eliza to start talking about the sales of the company. At first she was the only salesperson until Anna started to sell her products and through Rosemary she made acquaintance with Sadie who became her second salesperson. This Eliza understands to have been an important event, a step that pushed her forward as Eliza herself does not believe she herself is a good salesperson. This resonates with the similar theme raised in the other stories, as an entrepreneur it is seen as necessary to concentrate on the core skills and competences and to hire people to conduct the other tasks. The need to remain humble is revisited in the story by suggesting that every business deal is an important event. Eliza and her sales people celebrate them although they have become regular and no longer bring any major thrills but it is seen as important not to forget that new deals are important events.

Eliza depicts becoming an entrepreneur in Finland as an easy issue if examined from the legal and technical side '*it is said that Finland is the easiest country to set up a firm*'. She shares this opinion and gives evidence to support her view. A person needs to fill in certain papers, find a name for the company, which is relatively hard because all the names are already reserved and to pay the registration fees. Curiously the idea of finding a name for the company pops up again. In this story Eliza relates the setting up of the firm as a technical exercise of registering the firm. Then she turns the discussion to other difficulties entrepreneurs face, talking about how entrepreneurs always complain about taxation and although admitting that taxes could be less, she has not experienced it as a barrier to her entrepreneurship. The EU-membership has even helped her because importing inside the EU is like doing business at home. She concludes that it is up to the entrepreneur how she makes it. Thus, Eliza starts the story by referring to the environmental and technical aspects but takes it back to the person level – the individual entrepreneur who makes the difference in the business and is the key to success or failure. She gives her own business as an example. Although operating in a highly competitive market, by concentrating on high quality, individually de-

signed and costly products she has found a niche for her products. She however acknowledges that this is not possible in all industries, for example, transportation companies have limited opportunities for differentiation. Talking about the difficulties of entrepreneurs in Finland leads Eliza to talk about politics and how she finds it amusing that before elections all politicians are interested in entrepreneurs, which is good for publicity but she would also appreciate some concrete activities, for example lowering of VAT. Then her earlier opinion of it not being a major issue is adopted, especially from the point-of-view of her business operating in the business-to-business market. On the other hand, she admits that the problem might be more topical in service companies. Then even this idea is renounced in Eliza's narration as she suggests that the service enterprises should try to improve and differentiate their services, for example, hairdressers should be extremely professional or invent a specialty to provide a theatre-like experience for customers as opposed to just providing hair-cuts.

6.3.7 Mentoring relationship and networking

After setting up the new enterprise Eliza participates in the mentoring programme at the Female Business Club where Rosemary is her mentor. The mentoring relationship turns out to be a very fruitful one. The two women become the models for the mentoring programme and they tour the country telling their stories. When analysing the two stories I also notice that there are some common elements in them suggesting that it is possible to transfer values and ideas through mentoring.

Our discussion around mentoring serves as an example of my own role in generating data. Sometimes when asking a particular question I noticed immediately that I had chosen the wrong words but once uttered there was no way of reversing them. I felt I guided the participant too much, which is a minor problem because in the end all interviews are guided. Nevertheless, it is exactly these points in the interviews where it is interesting to investigate my role in them.

Ulla: *'You mentioned the mentoring project – So, who have been the influential people for your entrepreneurship?'*

Eliza: *'Yes, in the mentoring project my own mentor, Rosemary'.*

The introduction 'you mentioned the mentoring project' directs the participant to reveal who have been the influential people in the mentoring project. With the last part of the question 'who have been the influential people for your entrepreneurship' I try to redirect Eliza's attention

away from the mentoring project towards a more general idea of the people who influenced her entrepreneurship. But it does not work as Eliza's thinking is now focused towards constructing a story of the people involved with the mentoring project. In her answer she accepts my suggestion that the mentoring project did involve influential people, firstly, her mentor and secondly, the other actors in the mentoring project who were all facing the same situation and shared the same feelings of insecurity. They used to gather at cafés to talk and think about issues and to support one another. The meaning of others facing the similar situation is interpreted from the sole entrepreneur identity: When working alone it is possible to sit in front of the computer without receiving any feedback and for this reason it is important to find peer groups and people to talk to. This is supported by Eliza's current entrepreneurial lifestyle where she runs around the city to meet other entrepreneurs to discuss issues over a cup of coffee. This is a form of activity that Eliza identifies as networking although she finds the term a bit overused '*do not apply it in everything*' directing we researchers and promoters of entrepreneurship to be cautious of the term. For Eliza networking means people gathering to exchange ideas and experiences in an honest way sharing not only the successes but also the problems as well.

In Eliza's story mentoring is constructed as a vehicle for transferring knowledge. At the beginning of an entrepreneurial career the nascent entrepreneur needs answers to a lot of questions and mentoring can help by indicating where and whom to ask. Eliza emphasizes that the entrepreneur needs to make their own decisions but it is possible to discuss and weigh some of the questions with another experienced entrepreneur and the mentor can clarify things that the new entrepreneur cannot see in the awful hurry, hassle and panic. This image of the new entrepreneur contradicts sharply with the image of the lazy entrepreneur drawn later possibly to highlight the differences between the start-up phase and the managing the business phase. Mentoring is also regarded as important because the role of the family is to give unconditional support for the new entrepreneur 'of course you will make it'. The mentor is a third party who has only recently come to know the entrepreneur and knows only facts and figures with has no emotional attachment, therefore if the mentor believes in the idea this gives the nascent entrepreneur a tremendous morale boost. This suggests that in the start-up phase an individual weighing the decision and calculating the pros and cons is not really sure who to trust and the support of close friends and relatives, together with one's own beliefs, can be dismissed as wishful thinking. A third party especially an experienced entrepreneur is trusted to have a more objective

view. The mentor can also open doors, and provide valuable personal contacts for the entrepreneur, which proved to be the case with Eliza. The business gift market is very competitive with a lot of ‘wheelers and dealers’ so it is very difficult to be credible and prove to potential customers that the products are high-quality items. Through Rosemary’s contacts Eliza has been granted entry into companies to show her products.

Eliza’s products are ties and scarves but in the beginning she also had several other ideas as backup plans. It was her mentor who helped her to focus on the ties and scarves. This feature (of not focusing) is presented as typical for start-up entrepreneurs and is supported by the evidence. Eliza in her turn has met beginners on various occasions and she has noticed that they try to diversify too much, which has made her to wonder how she could help them to realize the need to focus rather than to diversify. She gives other examples where she has now found herself in the mentoring position, for example a friend asked her out for a coffee and suddenly Eliza realized that the friend was interested in becoming an entrepreneur and wanted her advice. Eliza refuses the official mentor status possibly because she believes she does not yet have enough knowledge or experience but she is glad to help and answer questions if she can, which she admits is a sort of mentoring. This also serves as an example of how meanings are being negotiated in the interviews. In this story her role of being a mentor is both refused and accepted. It is difficult to establish an either/or relationship to mentoring but a layered account where both roles are possible is narrated.

Similarly to Diane’s story (6.4, p. 182), Eliza thinks the sharing of knowledge is an important and worthwhile activity. Eliza then talks about the Female Business Club where the interview is held. Eliza adopts a young entrepreneur’s position where she has received a lot of information from the older entrepreneurs at the Club who she describes as not ‘old dinosaurs’. This could be understood in light of Eliza’s perception of the activities of the entrepreneurs’ associations that we discuss in the end of the interview. She shuns the idea of formal meetings with agendas and minutes of the meetings but relies more on free swimming in the networks. She describes the entrepreneurs’ associations as ‘relics’ and ‘granny networks’ making a contrast to the people she has learned to know and to appreciate in the Club.

6.3.8 Creating a balance with entrepreneurship and life

Eliza takes pride that the company has managed to generate profit from the very first year, which she compares with the typical situation where

profit can normally be expected only after a few years. The turnover of the company is currently around €150.000 that she portrays as ideal for her company. Eliza refuses the idea of striving for growth, which she explains by the fear of losing her freetime. In the story doubling the turnover is refused on the basis of having to work 24 hours a day to achieve it. From the design point-of-view taking in larger orders, which would also result in a growth in turnover, would not be a problem as such. The problem arises because Eliza does not trust anybody but herself and occasionally her sales people to check the products and maintain their high quality, thus, restricting the boundaries for growth to the number of products she can check and pack herself. The sales people help Eliza because they feel they are a part of the company and Eliza tries to maintain this relationship by asking them for new ideas and suggestions and involving them in the business. Although a sole entrepreneur in the legal and financial sense the business is extended to cover the sales agents of the company (see also Rosemary's story of her subcontractors).

The talk around the freetime gets Eliza talking about her philosophy of the lazy entrepreneur that she has developed with some other like-minded entrepreneurs. The meanings attached to the concept of time and life are interesting in Eliza's story: She dislikes the idea of being bound by strict working times (from nine to five) but she likes to commit herself in a flexible manner and to work seriously for her entrepreneurship indicating the need to sometimes work long hours but she wants to enjoy her life and not to commit 24 hours a day to her entrepreneurship.

We share with friends - other entrepreneurs with collegial spirit - this kind of a lazy entrepreneur's philosophy so we don't spend 24 hours [a day] with a grimace on our face but we go for a coffee and enjoy it, we go shopping in the middle of the day but we still take the entrepreneurship seriously and we do the job on time so that it [entrepreneurship] won't suffer from it [going for coffee/shopping] but really it is necessary to give time to yourself.

Eliza's story can therefore be interpreted as a resistance against the stories and myths about entrepreneurship that she uses as resources to construct her own story. She develops the philosophy of a 'lazy entrepreneur' as a counterforce against the myth of having to work for 24 hours a day in order to be a real entrepreneur. She gives several examples of how she spends time having coffee with friends or on the beach if the business is slow or she needs to take time off. This talk is legitimised by the business being financially viable. The lazy entrepreneur philosophy is linked with the importance of social contacts for Eliza. She believes that many

of the entrepreneurs who burn out or run out of ideas are those that keep hanging around the office for 24 hours a day. In Eliza's story the entrepreneurs working 24 hours per day are thus associated with losers and not the hardworking heroic icons of the traditional entrepreneurship discourse (as well as in the current employment discourse). This image of the losers also helps Eliza to stand up for her philosophy, to construct it as a sensible option rather than being a frivolous attitude and activity. The social contacts also prove useful for the business as well. It is through spending time with other entrepreneurs that Eliza gets a lot of her ideas and inspirations, thus, making it a more fruitful endeavour than staying at work. This is also interesting in analysing what counts as work in our discussions. Although the nature of work is said to be shifting towards knowledge work, which can be done independently of the workplace, it is difficult to quantify in terms of time but needs to be assessed on the results (Alvesson 2001), yet there are strong counter arguments that working still needs to be made visible in the eyes of others and ourselves. (See also stories of Jonathan 6.2, p. 139 and Marge 6.5, p. 202) It makes me wonder whether in the story of Eliza the entrepreneurs who claim to be working 24 hours a day are actually engaged in the same game as they need to reassure themselves (and others) that they are working hard, doing everything they can for the business and in case of a failure there is nothing more that could have been done as it is impossible to exceed the 24 hour limit per day. The personal time gets blurred with the business time or work time and they feel they have to be available to their customers at all times. (Culkin – Smith 2000, 150-151.)

Ulla: When you said you do not want to be an entrepreneur 24 hours a day, has it come through experience or...?

Eliza: Yes. Or, it is astonishing, it has not really come through experience other than realising it is possible to be an entrepreneur and not work 24 hours [a day]. In the beginning it was being blazed everywhere. That when you go to these entrepreneurship courses or to those information events so on every occasion [it is said] that an entrepreneur is [on call] 24 hours seven days a week and all the year around. I already started to think that it is an odd thing if one needs to act like that...

It is during the first year when she notices that although she is working hard she is able to take time off, have a vacation and still her business does not suffer. With Sadie, the other salesperson, who shares her ideology they sometimes have a cup of coffee in the middle of a day laughing at it being 'very sinful' indicating their awareness of the contradiction be-

tween their ideology and the existing norm. Eliza renounces sitting in front of the computer all day as a useless effort that she had learned when working for TextileCo. If one spends a day in front of the computer developing a phobia for white paper then it is much better to leave, go for a walk or to the library. On the other hand, if there are 2-3 assignments on line there is a need to work hard and long hours but as it is not customary it is possible to enjoy these moments. Eliza suggests that the whole concept of the 24-hour-entrepreneur should be crushed and destroyed but wonders who would dare to do it. This suggests that Eliza acknowledges how the concept limits the ways entrepreneurs in general are expected to act. At the same time going against these norms or myths is described as a risky task. A journalist who learned about her philosophy harassed her for months asking for an interview but she could not accept fearing that some of her potential customers might not take her seriously afterwards, dismissing her as an amateur who tinkers at entrepreneurship and who has a rich husband to support her, which is not the message Eliza wants to send. Eliza is not prepared to set an example, the norm being so strong that she could lose her credibility in the eyes of her customers.

6.3.9 Female entrepreneurship

Eliza's story differs from the other stories of women in this study since it is not woven against the story of a family. To my question of the family's reactions towards her entrepreneurship she gives the answer of that her childhood family has reacted positively. She attributes this to them being used to her sudden moves by the time she decided to become an entrepreneur. An example is of going to study in the City at the University of Arts and Design. Her earlier life decisions are construed as unusual ones, which legitimises her decision to become an entrepreneur from the point-of-view of her family. She acknowledges, however, the relevance of my question by referring to other women whose husbands have refused to allow their wives to go into entrepreneurship at least with 'their money' suggesting that women may have problems in getting the necessary support from their families in the start-up phase. Although the family is not elaborated on in Eliza's story, it is female entrepreneurship that is touched upon in the interview suggesting that women need to narrate their stories from the position of a female entrepreneur who may or may not be different from their male counterparts.

In the interview we start discussing if she in general has encountered resistance to or lack of belief in her entrepreneurship. Eliza says that surprisingly this time there were no such incidents. However back at the

time of the ‘amateur entrepreneurship’ she came across it much more, which she attributes to her being younger with an even younger outlook. Then, to accommodate my need to explore potential problems she tells of an experience with the bank where she was forced to use her mother’s apartment as collateral for getting an account with a credit limit of less than €12.000. The exaggerated need for collateral could be interpreted as a lack of belief in her business. This event is further exemplified when she wanted to raise the limit to €17.000, which was refused altogether by the bank. From the current position of having a steady cash-flow and savings these events are portrayed as amusing as the bank now has a totally new attitude towards her business. She illustrates this by mimicking the bank manager’s current position: *‘How may we serve you, would you like some coffee and pastry?’* Adopting the voice and vocabulary of the bank-manager helps to illustrate the new, humble attitude of the bank towards her with the funny image of the bank manager eagerly offering coffee and pastries. The new attitude at the bank has also given Eliza the opportunity of criticising the bank and their decision, which they have now admitted was unreasonable. With the event Eliza constructs an injustice that she has faced, which is legitimised by the bank’s admittance of a false judgement on their part and the current positive and humble attitude taken towards her business. Then in the discussion the issue of gender surfaces:

Eliza: But these are the kind of problems that everyone faces. Maybe a man would have got that thirty thousand easier. But surely otherwise it is so that...

In the previous quote Eliza is first with the idea that all entrepreneurs face similar problems with e.g. financing that Eliza has come across. Then she shifts her opinion – that maybe a man would have found it easier to get a loan providing a gendered explanation of her difficulties – but she returns to her original idea that she has not faced more resistance than any other entrepreneur. This passage is illustrative of the negotiation taking place in the interview.

She then proceeds to explain that she has learned to be demanding, thus, constructing a reason for why she has not faced too many difficulties subsequently as an entrepreneur. For example, she portrays herself sitting at the transportation company saying that she will not leave without her package, which the company denies the existence of. Being demanding is not in her understanding the same as being difficult or tough because she is also friends with the people at the transportation company ‘*we have good chats*’ but being demanding is a necessary skill for an en-

trepreneur acquired through experience. Previously she thought that things worked out if she was nice and friendly but this in her current view is portrayed as an illusion and a false expectation. The nice girl position is abandoned in favour of the demanding, yet fair and decent person.

The story of receiving support from others is further continued in Eliza's narration. There has not been anybody who has approached her with a disapproving wonder but rather her being entrepreneur is respected by others. This idea is further elaborated on in Eliza's story of a class reunion. Her classmates expected her to have become a secretary or something similar but when they learned that she was an entrepreneur they came to talk to her saying that they too would be interested in the option if there were not the family and the house mortgage to consider. This story is told to intensify her message that her choice is respected and even glorified by her friends and family. The classmates' attitudes are used to illustrate another issue. She identifies lack of courage to be the reason why in Finland so few people become entrepreneurs in comparison to the US. Eliza, thus, makes a distinction between herself and those without courage and risk taking ability to support her earlier account of becoming an entrepreneur.

It is on this basis that Eliza refutes my query that all people are capable of becoming an entrepreneur. On this occasion Eliza creates a role for the support agencies; they are necessary and of help when assessing and evaluating the ideas people have. Thus, a similar idea is put forward to the discussion of mentoring – a third party with a neutral attitude towards the entrepreneur and an objective point-of-view is needed to help in the process. This idea Eliza supports with concrete examples of people who have bizarre ideas about entrepreneurship. A woman has called Eliza twice inquiring where she can get money to experiment in entrepreneurship expecting there to be a fund where all interested may receive financing to try out entrepreneurship without having to invest any of their own money in the endeavour. In addition, in the mentoring programme one of the actors believed that money starts pouring in the very moment the company is established. Eliza pictures an ideal entrepreneur as one who is aware of the realities before setting up the business. Eliza takes herself as an example. Before the start-up she attended fairs and information events to find out about the legal obligations that the entrepreneur has to take care of. This demonstrates that she knew the harsh reality of entrepreneurship prior to the start-up. Although initially she found it hard to believe that it would be possible to accumulate the sufficient turnover to support herself let alone to pay obligatory expenses, the payments are

now made from her account without her thinking or worrying about them. This construction helps to view Eliza's activities as a success story; first, terrified of the picture of the harsh reality given at the fair, yet still finding courage to set-up the firm and finally being able to make the necessary payments without much effort. The threshold for calculating the financial requirements is depicted as a necessary one for a nascent entrepreneur in the story.

In Eliza's story an entrepreneur needs to be courageous, flexible and realistic about the time expectations attached to being an entrepreneur '*one cannot be an entrepreneur from 8 to 4*'. Thus, the time aspect in the entrepreneurship is revisited again by refuting the idea that entrepreneurship can be limited to office hours, yet, previously she has refuted the idea of needing to be an entrepreneur 24 hours a day. An entrepreneur also needs to be capable of taking risks, which is translated to not worrying or to getting depressed over small things. Eliza gives an example of the small worries that an entrepreneur has to tolerate '*if your bank account is at zero you have to believe that you'll pull through*'. Again this is related to Eliza's first operating year in the business when every month her account went into the red. This is reflected against the rewarding moment she had when realising that after having paid all the invoices there was still money in her bank account.

'Sally Smith [another entrepreneur] always calls it death valley; the moment when everything seems to go wrong and nothing works and if an entrepreneur gets through this then she really is cut out to be an entrepreneur'.

This is an interesting passage in Eliza's story – 'death valley'¹⁴ is a concept that refers to the period after the company is set up when money is tied up in investments, marketing and commercialisation of products resulting in a negative cash flow. The death valley period is often visualised with a cash flow curve that falls below zero suggesting that if the company is not able to produce cash flow its existence will cease, the company gets stuck and dies in the valley. (Hytti – Heinonen 2000, 162-164) The idea proposed in Eliza's story is a more personal one where death valley is presented as a highly individual experience of the entrepreneur (not the cash flow problem of the company) facing the impossible. Thus, it seems that the concepts and the ideas developed in research

¹⁴ The concept death valley is a direct translation of the Finnish word 'kuolemanlaakso' that has been adopted at least in Finland to describe a certain period of the company life-cycle. In English literature the concept is not applied as such but the problem is identified. (See for example Scott – Bruce 1987, 48)

enter into the practice of entrepreneurship but the meanings of these concepts may change (See also Hytti et al 2001). Then Eliza again presents the idea of needing to remain humble, where difficulties are necessary and as she says there are still ‘small valleys’ in the business, which help to make the entrepreneur firmer, tougher and force the person to reflect on business activities. This idea is supported by an example from her entrepreneurial life. In the spring there is always a period when her customers are not making any decisions, first she panics but then remembers that it is normal in this period and takes her books out to the beach. This example highlights in a very practical manner how experience plays an important role in entrepreneurship. Facing the situation for the first time one cannot recognise the cyclical, short-term nature of the slow period, it is only in the coming years that this is possible.

6.3.10 Building security

Eliza constructs her future to be in entrepreneurship although she accepts that her business idea might someday be outdated and she might need to find a new idea. So, Eliza does not count on retiring from the enterprise as it is now but she believes that she will develop new ideas all the time if the current idea no longer works. This she supports with the idea that she has already changed her profession once which serves as evidence of her ability to do the same in the future. In addition, her belief is founded around her skill, which is in her hands (design) so she can be creative and develop new ideas. This creativity provides her with unlimited opportunities. She makes a distinction between her business and a hardware store with the latter having a more limited set of opportunities. She parallels her design work with that of detective’s work where she detects and accomplishes her customers’ wishes providing her with a lot of opportunities in the future.

At the end of the interview when we talked about the entrepreneurs’ associations and their activities Eliza says that many people have confronted her and said she should join the unemployment fund of the association. Eliza refuses, firstly, because she finds it outrageously expensive and secondly because it would not solve her problem.

That it is a necessity right away - if the situation arose that [I] became unemployed - to start developing something new. I’ll go and sell in a kiosk, I don’t hold the belief that I would be above all that, that I could not go work in a kiosk.

Hence, for Eliza becoming an unemployed and receiving allowances is not an option but some sort of employment would have to be found. On this occasion the alternatives of potential employment are depicted to cover all sorts of work. The alternative of remaining without a job is not presented as an option, Eliza believes that something can always be found if an individual is ready to accept any job. The idea of being humble is therefore presented from another angle in the story.

To the question of whether she would even consider joining another company Eliza recounts a story of a job opportunity which was presented to her. She was offered a job in Denmark, which would have been a wonderful 'gig', the manager even came to Finland to discuss it with Eliza, demonstrating their seriousness of recruiting her and she was asked to submit a bid. She then submitted a large bid and was not asked to join. The 'large bid' serves two purposes in the story, first, it seems to demonstrate her unwillingness to join another company and second, it provides a reason why in the end she was not asked to join the company. Her disinterest towards going to work in another organisation Eliza bases on having gone far enough with the current business that she is in a different position to her earlier situation when she went to work for TextileCo. Then being an entrepreneur was fun but the monthly salary was more tempting which is no longer the case. Thus, in this story entrepreneurship is understood through the metaphor of a journey. The entrepreneur identifies having reached a point after which there is no turning, the journey back would be too long, difficult or even impossible as the entrepreneur has learned to enjoy entrepreneurship and the qualities attached. The contradiction in her story is however present as she did submit a bid to the Danish company suggesting that a large enough figure would make the return journey worthwhile and possible. Her reluctance to work for somebody else is further substantiated. In another company sooner or later her responsibility would be limited '*this does not involve you anymore*'. Eliza then engages in a narration to further celebrate the positive sides of being an entrepreneur: freedom of making all the decisions and keeping control of all the strings in her hand. This need for control is also applied in explaining why she does not want to expand the company, she wants to be in charge and be familiar with everything in the company. In her current business Eliza can even make stupid mistakes that she can learn from. This idea is present in Rosemary's story with nearly the same phrasing making me wonder whether mentoring is a direct way of transferring values and ideas and of creating a sense of what it is to be an entrepreneur.

6.3.11 Discussion on Eliza's entrepreneurial identity

Eliza narrates her story from the current position of being an entrepreneur (the end of the story) making sense of the different events taking place throughout her life for her current entrepreneurship (Lewis 2001, 124). Her educational and her other career choices are narrated as exceptional, surprising accidents. Given her background of being 'bad at textile work' she is surprised to have been steered towards the field first graduating from the home economics school and then from university. Two phases of her life – experience from working as a freelancer (although portrayed as something of a childlike play) and experience from work for employment – are linked together and it is not either of them independently but the two together that are important elements for her current entrepreneurship. By having experienced the two she has learned the best and the worst of both and, therefore, is able to make her choice based on actual life experiences. This narrative construction is applied in order to make sense of and resolve the contradictions in Eliza's story. First, to quit self-employment for employment, which is later reversed by quitting employment for self-employment. In Eliza's construction it is made evident that both experiences are necessary for the 2nd round of being an entrepreneur that is also constructed as largely different from the 1st round. During the first round the transition from the self-employment to employment can be explained by Eliza's portrayal of her own entrepreneurship as something 'not serious', and the second transition is explained through the negative experiences regarding working for employment and having knowledge of an alternative, entrepreneurship. Thus, both the experiences are reconstructed as positive ones and given meaning – they were something that she needed to do in order to be where she is now as a professional and successful designer and entrepreneur.

Eliza's story is framed with and against the common knowledge and myths regarding entrepreneurs that help Eliza to tell her story by applying them as resources in her story. She emphasises her own entrepreneurial story as exceptional as she does not have the typical background of an entrepreneur being born in a family with entrepreneurs. Yet, similar to other entrepreneurs she drifted into entrepreneurship. She accepts the notion of entrepreneurs as courageous, flexible, hardworking, risk taking individuals but refutes the myth that an entrepreneur needs to work 24 hours a day seven days a week. In addition, there are similar passages in the stories of Rosemary and Eliza, two entrepreneurs with a close relationship, suggesting that it is possible to transfer ideas, values and a no-

tion of what it is to be in entrepreneurship through these kinds of relationships and mentoring.

Eliza sees her future to be in entrepreneurship and applies the metaphor of having travelled so far in her journey that the return trip might be difficult or even impossible. Eliza states that while acting as an entrepreneur one learns to enjoy the good sides of entrepreneurship, the freedom of making the decisions and being fully responsible for all the decisions in the company. This makes it hard to return to a point where freedom and responsibility are taken away suggesting that compensation for a return trip has to be substantial. Eliza, acknowledges that her business idea might be outdated someday but relies on her creativity to provide her with new ideas, hence, she identifies in her story as a creative person with unlimited opportunities and a humble attitude that make it possible for her to find a job in the worst of times. Being a realist with a humble attitude is important for Eliza, which also legitimises the need to face difficulties as necessary for an entrepreneur to maintain these qualities in their entrepreneurial career. Eliza defines this portrait as the ideal entrepreneur.

6.4 Diane's Story

Diane (in her fifties) is in the business of providing training and counselling services for female entrepreneurs in her region. The company was set up in 1995.

6.4.1 Presenting the scene

The process of choosing 'good cases' for my study is a lengthy one. In the meetings with my supervisor we discuss different potential participants and try to locate people who could possibly add to the heterogeneity of the entrepreneurial stories that I had set out to collect. At several meetings we try to think of an entrepreneur who would have a background in the public sector and at one meeting my supervisor suggests I contact Diane, which I do. Diane accepts my request for an interview (in fact nearly all entrepreneurs that I have come across and there must be hundreds, have agreed to be interviewed and this makes me wonder why entrepreneurs are so willing to share their stories with a researcher?). We have to reschedule the meeting a few times because Diane's husband is seriously ill and she thinks she might not be in at the right frame of mind on those particular days. Luckily I received this information through e-

mail because I feel I would have lacked the words to say anything meaningful or I might have said something terribly wrong to her. I do not really have any experiences of illnesses.

In the end we manage to schedule the interview and we meet in Diane's office. The office is accessible straight from the street and has large open windows. I am half an hour early but I decide to go in and ask if she minds starting a bit early. She does not mind but she needs to finish writing an e-mail before we can start. We descend to her office downstairs. The interior is tasteful and feminine with an inviting deep red sofa. During the course of the interview I discover that she has not worked in the public sector as such but her entrepreneurship has mainly concentrated on working with public sector projects. However at this point I am already at her office far away from my home base and my tape recorder is already running so I decide to go ahead with the interview in any case.

In the interview I become sensitive to the different female entrepreneurs that are being presented, the strong and the weak, the cautious, the bold, the arrogant. Diane's story is interwoven with stories of others and most of the stories that she tells relate back to her services, substantiating the need for them. Diane answers my questions with long narrations and vivid stories giving many practical examples of actual events that have taken place. We talk for more than two hours but I feel that we could have talked for the rest of the day. For example, Diane is very keen on thinking about the region and its future and after the interview we continue talking about it for a while before I leave.

During the interview it becomes clear that Diane appreciates my project as well as studies and research in general:

Scene 1: 'The tape recorder makes a clicking sound. The tape has come to an end. I smile apologetically for the interruption. *I have to change the tape*, I say and I lean towards my bag looking for a new tape. *How has it been?* Diane asks. I take it she means the interview. *It's been great. It is interesting to hear all the different stories. No, I meant the doctoral studies? Oh, that...* I say. *It has been great also. I feel that this has been my best project ever.* I have the new tape and Diane continues the story she was telling before the break.

Scenes 2 and 3: Diane talks of her own studies. *Then all the time something, all the time I take different courses, in sales, in marketing that I don't think I have had a moment where I haven't had some kind of on-going education. [] I have come to the conclusion that this eMBA is a much better system for me than to go after a Master's degree. I can do it when I have taken the eMBA if I feel like continuing it - it is apparently also possible to take a doctor's dissertation. It apparently takes seven*

years. *My sister is in that pipe now.* **Laughter** *I said that let's agree now, when you're ten years younger than I am, that when you defend your dissertation I've done a little bit of it too as I lured you into studying.* **laughter**

Scene 4: I pause the tape-recorder as the interview has come to an end and I start collecting my pads and pens. Diane asks: *Is Professor Paasio at your institute?* Yes, yes, I answer, *he is the big boss in our department thinking about the black-bearded ball of energy that rushes in and out of the office.* Yes, Diane says, *I've been taking a course and he has given some lectures.*

6.4.2 Professional taking a sabbatical

Diane begins her entrepreneurial story by describing her strong professional background in marketing and talking about her work life prior to setting up the company. Identifying as a strong professional in sales and marketing is subsequently revealed to be important to Diane. A few years before the start-up she went to work in a radio station, a career move that she made knowing that it probably would not last long. After eight months the station went bankrupt and Diane was left without a job. She does not make it clear why she thought the job might be a short-term one, whether she anticipated the financial problems or whether she just accepted that it might not be 'her thing' after all as with some of her other career moves. The period of unemployment that followed her time at the radio station Diane labels as a sabbatical. The period of unemployment is framed as a much-needed break between the jobs rather than a grim and desperate period reflecting on the contemporary career discourse. New career approaches are replacing the old ideals. Long-term employment contracts are being replaced by short-term ones that are bound together with periods of further education and training or in some cases unemployment (Mallon 1998, 361). Since her move to the radio station turns out to be a mistake in the sense that it leads to unemployment, Diane needs to make sense of the move in the interview. Knowing that the contract might not be a long-term one and calling the follow-up period of unemployment a sabbatical serve, therefore, to legitimise the decision of voluntarily leaving a permanent job to accept what in retrospect proved to be a doomed opportunity in the story.

During the sabbatical she engages in voluntary work and enjoys herself. Diane makes a point of emphasising that she did not slouch during the sabbatical but rather was involved in meaningful work and the enjoyment of it reflects that it was a necessary, well deserved break and not

a waste of time. During this period the idea of going into a business of her own occurs to her but she accepts another job where she stays for about a year although again she felt it was not 'her thing' from the very beginning. The year turns out to be important because she develops the necessary contacts for the start-up, so although foolish in terms of her professional career as such the year is constructed as a meaningful period for the entrepreneurship.

6.4.3 Starting up

During the next four months at home she prepares the start-up of her company which she launched in 1995. Her idea is to provide sales and marketing services but the business slowly transforms into providing training and counselling activities for female entrepreneurs. Diane explains that this is common with other entrepreneurs. She has noticed when listening to other female entrepreneurs at the network – that their business activities develop from the original business idea into something else. In this sense she identifies with other (female) entrepreneurs.

So, Diane becomes an entrepreneur in 1995 but then Diane reveals that although she is narrating her story as an entrepreneur, she is currently working as an employee for the network. This she explains is because of her domestic situation, which would make it impossible for her to acquire the necessary additional work besides the work she does for the female entrepreneurship network required to fully support herself. As a wage-worker receiving a salary and having her pension payments paid by her employer, she manages with the salary she receives for running the network but as an entrepreneur she would need to have additional work to make enough money. This theme reoccurs in the interview highlighting the financial advantages of being employed rather than being an entrepreneur.

6.4.4 Gender matters

The current project is the third project in which Diane has participated. The first one was a training project after which a female entrepreneur association was formed, which is very active and the entrepreneurs have built strong networks. The second project was a mentoring project where they had 11 mentors. She explains that the project was successful in terms of quality but not in quantity, as they could not find enough mentees for their project because the financier charged the participating mentees too much. Offering mentoring services has, however, developed into

one of the services of the network. The network itself is the third project and the idea was formed during the first project when the group visited a resource network in southern Europe. The idea was developed for three years, and then the female entrepreneurs developed the idea further and Diane submitted the application for it.

Not everybody, however, welcomed the network, it has received a lot of opposition during its existence. An important source of frustration for Diane is the successful, established female entrepreneurs who have directly opposed her services and the network in general. This is an important theme in Diane's story. In Diane's explanation these women feel that targeting female entrepreneurs specifically is demeaning to them since the concept suggests that female entrepreneurs need specific support and the established entrepreneurs do not recognise this need because they are themselves self-made women (Silius 1995, 62). In addition, since the project is financed primarily by the public sector it has created the suspicion that Diane's business is directly subsidised through the project. As a result the network has not been able to reach successful entrepreneurs, nor the small, uneducated entrepreneurs that are entrepreneurs just to earn a living and to avoid unemployment. On this occasion a distinction is made between real entrepreneurs and those earning just a living – later, however, earning a living is considered a valuable endeavour in entrepreneurship. Therefore, the target group for the network is described as those that have some education, that are reasonably successful and are looking for some energy and drive to improve their profitability – *'the ones that are already one step ahead'*. Overall, it is quite difficult to recruit women into the network, which Diane explains by citing the mental recession of the region and the difficulty of speaking about one's own entrepreneurship and problems. Contradictorily, however, she also says that every day new entrepreneurs contact the network.

Although she identifies with the strong, self-made women because she thinks of herself as someone who has and will seek advice and help from anybody and anywhere, *'who will go through stone if necessary'*, she wonders why those who have made it themselves are so reluctant to help others.

6.4.5 Creating a role for the network

The resistance faced by the network is visible in Diane's story where Diane engages in several narratives where the role and importance of the network are emphasised. This makes sense in the given context as the network has faced a lot of pressure and opposition. As an example joint

activities is a service that female entrepreneurs expect the network to supply. Craft entrepreneurs feel it is rather burdensome to travel around and participate at fairs alone so they are planning to join forces.

And now when we have the first set-up meeting for this week's activities, the aim is - the idea has sprung from the women themselves that - to set up a Christmas network. One of the entrepreneurs has listed different events in Finland and the aim is to have as many entrepreneurs, at least four or five, who will tour these events and who will have the products of the whole network with them. We hope that it won't fade after Christmas and that we can keep it up somehow. I don't believe that it'll work if the women themselves take care of it, I think there must be somebody who'll do some follow up at the beginning before it becomes stable to make sure it continues. Then I think there needs to be some training, whether it be mental development or psychological training or something like that... so that the women can understand the demands of working in this kind of network. For example, one cannot be jealous, and jealousy is something that surfaces quite often, where - she is not selling my products although they are on display but she is surely selling her own products and such like. I feel that everybody does not necessarily know how to behave in this kind of network, that is not enough just to sit in meetings, bring products and then take the products of others to some fair.

The entrepreneurs could run the network themselves but according to Diane there are several reasons why they will not succeed in developing a working and functional network alone. Although the initiative has sprung from the entrepreneurs Diane feels they need a co-ordinator for the activities. In this way, a role is created for the network and Diane's entrepreneurship.

Diane emphasises that not everybody is suited to become an entrepreneur – it needs a particular personality, who has a tolerance for risk, insecurity and loneliness. On the other hand the network is an important instrument in solving the loneliness problem. They provide activities and mentors and short breaks for the entrepreneurs for example by taking a busload of women to a fair. The problems related to risk taking and insecurity cause fatigue and many of the female entrepreneurs eagerly participate in courses that deal with personal growth or a similar subject to counteract this. The network aims to promote training in other business-related subjects as well but the women adapt more easily to the 'soft subjects'. As an example of the focus on the 'hard subjects' the network emphasises the necessity of having an accountant. Diane gives herself as a

typical example of an entrepreneur who tried to do everything herself. She tried to calculate the VAT for her business herself. When she did hire an accountant she realised that she had to pay 10.000 marks extra. This experience taught her that it is not worthwhile doing things that one is not competent to do, it is better to hire a professional. Although it increases the entrepreneurs' outgoings it provides support and mental well-being in return. Now Diane subcontracts all her support services outside. This learning experience is similar to Rosemary's experience (6.1, p. 115). The networking activities are given meaning in making the life much easier and while they can be applied to locate needed services at the same time they also serve as marketing channels to sell one's own expertise. Diane's networks personally include both female and male members and they are assigned the meaning of a safety net for a sole entrepreneur emphasising the importance of networking especially for entrepreneurs working alone. Then, Diane starts talking about working from home.

6.4.6 Working alone: mixing professional with personal

Although Diane now has an office at the network she has also worked from home, which has not always been easy. The decision was based on saving costs but in the beginning it was quite difficult not so much for herself but for her husband. Although otherwise supportive of Diane's business activities he suggested that Diane could do some small chores at home as she was there all the time. Diane generalises that most women working from home do exactly this. For her it was, however, important to concentrate on her work, to work fulltime until her husband came home and then start working as a normal mother coming from work. From this construction it is noticeable that while she refuses to do the small chores during the day when she is working, she, however, accepts the role that after work she would become the normal mother cooking for the family and doing other housework. I try to empathize with her story but it is difficult and I feel a bit irritated. What is so normal about a woman wearing an apron in front of the stove? The strong presence of the family in Diane's story is a surprise to me. Why is it important for Diane or other women in my study to talk about their families when discussing their professional career? Is it that women have the main responsibility for the family life so it is not possible to narrate their career story without demonstrating how it is managed with the family life? Or do women need to reproduce a 'caretaker identity' or risk being labelled guilty of negligence towards their families, or of trying to imitate the masculine way of doing

things? Do women need to include family in their talk in order to ensure their professional aspirations are accepted? At the same time I question myself; why is important for me to separate family and professional life? Why does it seem to me that the male way of narrating the professional story by separating the professional from the personal is more normal than the female way of combining them? (See also Ahl 2002, 145-150)

Although Diane does not accept that working from home means she should do small chores while working, it does create an opportunity for her to do domestic work when not working; for example in between projects or when lacking motivation. It is again an example of how it is possible to combine the professional with the personal. However, she feels that as an entrepreneur in the service sector her credibility could be at risk if she organised meetings at home so she prefers to have the meetings elsewhere. This again serves as an example how we tend to associate the home sphere with a lack of credibility. It is not a male action to combine the professional with the personal, so the women who try to be professional and credible need to follow this rule albeit that it might be a lot more practical to have meetings at home. For example, in Diane's story, she felt that having one meeting in town destroyed the whole day as she tended to take the opportunity of leaving home for a meeting as a chance to visit other places as opposed to returning to home to concentrate on her work. It is for this reason that Diane emphasises that to be a sole entrepreneur one needs a strong mind and a lot of self-discipline.

In the story of working alone entrepreneurship is constructed as a burdensome activity. To balance this Diane then talks about the freedom that comes with being an entrepreneur. As an entrepreneur she is free to do anything she wants to, the business register frames the industry but otherwise there are no restrictions on one's creativity.

6.4.7 Family issues

In her narration of her professional life, Diane openly discusses the names of the organisations and the type of work she was engaged in. She talks about the jobs she used to do except for the last one before the start-up that she simply refers to as 'sales work' during the interview. This makes me rather curious and I ask her to elaborate on that period. She tells that the job involved working like an entrepreneur except that she received a small commission and there was a tight organisation with a strict system of vacations and weekends, whereas her other jobs were always quite flexible. She also explains that the job did not fit with her family life, that the family became quite irritated with the job. So, she felt

that she could not have continued with the job even if she had not become an entrepreneur. It is only at the end of the interview that she told me the firm was a Real Estate Agency, which explains her family's frustrations because real estate agents work on Sundays and in the evenings, i.e. the times when the other members of the family are at home. It does not become clear to me, however, why Diane is so reluctant to talk about this particular job and period in her career.

However, in the interview we have returned to the family theme so I discuss the rescheduling of the meeting that took place as a result of her husband's illness. On this occasion I do not ask Diane any specific questions because I feel reluctant to force her to speak about it unless she voluntarily engages in telling the story herself. Diane does talk about the issue but on a more general level, not talking about her personal sufferings or problems but about the fact that it was her husband's illness that made her realise what the accumulation of difficulties means to an entrepreneur. She acknowledges that as an entrepreneur she is in a rather special position as she has been involved in the long-term project and has not been forced to sell her training and consultancy services all the time. The need for financial security is important for Diane and her vulnerability in this sense became visible for her during her husband's illness. She has had to give up some of her external work because the illness necessitates that she spends more time at home. Furthermore, her husband's income has reduced due to the loss of overtime compensations and allowances. Therefore, the financial situation of the family is below what they are used to. To take the problems to a more general level she links these problems to the difficulties many entrepreneurs faced during the recession, for example the mental problems the financial difficulties caused. In this way the recession with all its consequences has entered the consciousness of entrepreneurs who were not directly affected by it. It may be that entrepreneurship in general has been reformed and renegotiated as a result of the recession in Finland particularly in Arthur's story (chapter 6.7, p. 236). It is especially in the difficult times when advice and help are seen necessary in Diane's story, re-emphasising the need of and a place for the network. She tells a story of a female entrepreneur who had anxiety attacks which she solved by inviting a male colleague from next door to talk with her. This story is not directly linked to the activities of the network but she heard it from a woman participating in the network suggesting that it is this type of informal networking and other activities that they're trying to promote among women and men alike. Diane emphasises the social role of the network by labelling it as a place offering social services; *'this is a social welfare office and we [Diane and her col-*

league] are the social broads'. Although constructed as a valuable role it is not a role appreciated by the financial controller. The social role in practice means that they have to set a fixed amount of time aside for the entrepreneurs especially those coming from the countryside or otherwise they will stay and tell their whole life history because they do not have anybody else to talk to. This depiction of female entrepreneurs in the countryside as lonely and in need of people to talk to supports the need for the network.

6.4.8 Gender matters part II

The financing for the network comes from two sources, from the European Commission through the regional employment and development office and from the private financing through the local business agency. On the board of the business agency there are three women and their attitudes have sometimes made Diane wonder whether they are of same sex at all. On the other hand, she partly understands them as she herself has not needed any support but found all the information she needed and resolved any issues herself. This represents a clash with the previous story where support and advice are portrayed as necessary for example when a family member is ill. It could be that Diane refers to the specific services for female entrepreneurs that she has not needed but she recognises the need for general services. This she bases on her personal experience of having more male mentors or discussants than female ones. Yet she thinks it is strange that those women who are strong and who have found all the answers themselves will not help other women struggling to survive. This talk around gender makes me feel quite uneasy. Partly I feel that I could find myself saying that for me it has not made any difference whether I was a woman or a man in my professional career because I have had a supportive family, studied in an environment with equal numbers of both female and male students. I have had a female boss and a female supervisor so I have actually felt that it is an advantage to be a woman, rather than a man in this environment. Yet it makes me wonder whether I am actually practising gender bias by trying to convince myself that my gender does not play any role in my life, which is of course a ridiculous idea. It is as if I am trying to convey an image of gender neutrality?

My own uneasiness is further strengthened when I listen to Diane's story of her clients, the female entrepreneurs. She engages in a defence of the importance of her services, of her large windows and open doors describing her clients as being afraid of the closed doors that are found in

the other support services to such an extent that they become a barrier for getting help (see also Eriksson – Pietiläinen 2001b).

I am the kind of person who will find out and go through anything, and it does not cause me any pain. There are a lot of entrepreneurs like me but the majority is the [another] kind. Now here in the city a lot of support services are centred on that corner and you go first through the door, come to the lobby where somebody sits and you tell her or him that you have this or this issue, you are guided to an elevator lobby behind one closed door, you have to take the elevator onto the floors and then you come out again to a lobby, for example, when going to the business agency and you need to go through a locked door again and there you find a labyrinth of narrow corridors and you have to call out name of the person that knows about your question. My claim is that at the point when the entrepreneur, the female entrepreneur from nowhere comes to the first elevator lobby she thinks 'shit!' and turns around 'I will make it myself when this is so difficult'. This is why it is so easy to come here. We have a lot of windows and we have not covered them with curtains or venetian blinds so we are 'on offer' to the street all the time. Everybody can see what we are doing here and they know they only need to open just one door from the street and they are in. This has been experienced as an easy thing. A female entrepreneur feels that 'I am like this small female entrepreneur who is not particularly important to society' and who has a lot of fear in the neck and is afraid to go meet the civil servants, who are men. In principle, except for the financier, they are all men in the support service organisations, so they [the women] do not dare to go there, they [the men] might ask a clever question...

The female entrepreneurs, the clients of the network, are afraid of the locked doors that are found in the normal support services to such an extent that they become a barrier to getting help. The image of the locked doors provides a strong contrast to the open windows of the network underlining the accessibility and availability of the services of the network for female entrepreneurs who feel they are small and unimportant in this society and who are afraid to get help from services predominantly run by male entrepreneurs.

Diane gives other practical examples of the services network provides, and talks about an initiative to help female entrepreneurs to become familiar with and purchase computers and software. This initiative was jointly organised with a computer company. The campaign was designed to be as simple as possible to reach the target group. Diane wrote the in-

vation because she did not believe that the computer experts could write it in an approachable way. The guys at the computer company commented; ‘*Hey, this is written for idiots*’ which highlighted the simplicity of the language used. However, Diane thinks it is important that the message is framed in a way that puts everybody is in the same position, nobody is better or worse. At the same time, an image of ‘ordinary people’ is being evoked in Diane’s story, ordinary people being those who represent the grey mass and appreciate simple, ordinary, even ugly things that Diane herself finds hard to understand. In addition, sometimes women approach the network with far too optimistic plans for example thinking that they can earn a living by making hand-made cards. On those occasions the network helps them to prepare financial calculations in order to demonstrate the difficulty of making enough money to earn a living. This is also an example of how the need for financial security is an important element in Diane’s story.

6.4.9 Restless soul – the theory of six year periods

Resigning from the real estate job was easy which Diane explains was because she had family pressure when working there and by her personal theory of the need to change scenery. In her story she evokes her personal theory of six-year intervals. First she talks about a company called Stephill where she worked for six years doing ‘every woman’s dream job’, which meant that she was promoted and got more power and responsibility in the job but nevertheless after the six years she had to get away. Then, in the Channel Company the same pattern reoccurred: after the six years she was asked to join the local radio station. She accepted the job even though she could not list any minuses to her former boss. She just felt she had given everything to that particular job and could not move forward in the organisation. The need for new challenges is also used to explain the entrepreneurial route and its suitability for her personally. Diane sees entrepreneurship as a flow of new and changing tasks, emerging opportunities and varying daily routines. The decision to go into entrepreneurship is justified in her narrative by her frequent career moves throughout her working life and her values and orientation. (See also Mallon and Cohen 2001, 225) Diane sees her career history in intervals of six years.

And I have always been like that, for example when I left - I had been working at Stephill for about six years and apparently I had every woman’s dream job. Well, it was a woman’s dream job, and well [I] got promoted, and was given power and responsibility or

responsibility and power how do you say it but when I had been there the full six years, so it was done and, well, I had to get away. I did the same trick when I was working at the Channel. When six years came, as I said, I indeed went to work at the radio station, , I was asked to work at the radio station and I knew it wouldn't last long but despite everything [I went there]. My boss in Helsinki asked me for the reasons, to list the plusses and the minuses of why I wanted to leave, so I had no minuses but I just had to get away, I felt I had given everything there already. I didn't have anything more to give and I couldn't, I couldn't advance in that organisation, that is important for me, that's why I became an entrepreneur.

Diane then talks of her earlier career history. Diane graduated in 78 during a period of major unemployment and thought she would not get a job. She got a job as a secretary at a dress firm, it involved working as a 'jack of all trades' and she stayed there for two years. Following that she went to work in a furniture business specialising as an export secretary. This turned out to be one of the short working periods that were not for her since the job mainly consisted of routines. She then went to the Stephill as a sales secretary for six years before, to everybody's horror, she decides to leave. After a hard selection and testing process she is appointed as a restaurant manager at a chain of pizzerias which she again described as one of the short flops in her working life. She ascribes this to her family situation at the time (her child was still very young) and by the American management style of the chain that she feels uncomfortable with. Then she is appointed as the sales person for a Channel where she is the first employee in the region and she is involved in the setting up of other regional offices. When the local radio station starts bombing her with job offers she finds it rather convenient because the end of the six-year period is approaching. After the bankruptcy of the station and the sabbatical, which followed she is selected for the Real Estate Agency, which she soon realises does not suit her either. She describes her working history as a search for her place in the world. This could be termed that her understanding of a career is close to the Adamson (1997, 246) model presenting a career as a vehicle for self-realisation. Similarly in the study of Mallon and Cohen (2001, 226) these changes are not always considered 'legitimate' in the eyes of others but rather they are considered foolish.

Everybody was so terrified that that I could just leave, leave something so great and wonderful that I could just leave the job.

That my husband has apparently had to stay thirty years in the same job that I have been able to do what I've wanted. That he has secured the bread on our family table.

In a sense this six-year interval theory is a legitimiser in Diane's narrative. She constructs an identity for herself where it is legitimate to make career changes and moves, even retrospectively foolish ones, e.g. going to work for a company that went bankrupt eight months after she joined it.

6.4.10 Role of others: networking

Diane does not attribute the decision to become an entrepreneur to the influence of others. Only a friend who reads palms has told her repeatedly that there is the entrepreneurship line in her palm. This is given as an example of meaningful others that have encouraged her into entrepreneurship. However, since the example is a rather absurd one it could be interpreted in fact to indicate the opposite and to underline that others have not been influential in her setting up the company. She portrays her becoming an entrepreneur to be more the result of her restless character and the result of prevailing conditions i.e. the bankruptcy of the radio station and her sabbatical, where she had the opportunity to reflect upon her future. She accepted the job as a real estate agent although she knew it was not for her but after a year she took courage and resigned from the job and after four months at home preparing for the start-up she started her business. Then there is a shift in the talk to a more general level as Diane starts to talk about the thresholds of becoming an entrepreneur '*if the threshold to become an entrepreneur was lower, many more would do it*'. She links this to her personal experience of leaving behind an allowance of about 7000 marks a month, which is constructed as an attractive solution compared to the insecurity linked with entrepreneurship, where it is possible to have assignments for the next few months but it offers no lifetime guarantees of continuity. Thus, entrepreneurship is again presented as a financially insecure solution by comparing it to the allowances available to the unemployed. This is to highlight that in Finland the support systems for the unemployed offer financial security unavailable to entrepreneurs. On the other hand, the fact she did not apply for continuation of the start-up financing indicates that although entrepreneurship is financially more insecure than employment or even unemployment she has managed to combat this insecurity by making it on her own right from the beginning.

Although others are not portrayed as meaningful for the start-up they are however important in the entrepreneurship as Diane's networking and discussion with partners are described as meaningful and important endeavours in Diane's story. The mentors are described as men who are leaders of large corporations and some female entrepreneurs at her level. Then a celebrity, a Finnish management consultant Jari Sarasvuo is introduced in the story as her great tutor who has influenced her entrepreneurship by giving her more self-confidence and self-assurance, suggesting a possible identification point with the other female entrepreneurs visiting the network. She herself has needed to be assured and supported although she has not sought the help from any specific female entrepreneur services. The reason why she feels Jari Sarasvuo to be especially compelling is that he is enough of a 'nonsense person' for her liking (see also Jonathan's story for naming an influential celebrity 6.2, p. 139).

6.4.11 Building the future as an entrepreneur

Diane sees her future '*definitely as an entrepreneur*' although she now works as an employee because it provides her with the necessary financial security given her current family situation. She is also definite about refusing to participate in other projects supported by the public sector because of the heavy bureaucracy involved that she lists in the interview '*slips, notes, reports, follow-ups*'. The bureaucracy in the interview is compared with the freedom of the entrepreneur and the entrepreneurial way of living. The decision to try to move away from public sector projects is explained firstly by her entrepreneurial career that has mainly consisted of these projects that have contributed to her understanding of how the bureaucracies work and secondly by the identified need to achieve the unreasonable objectives set for the network that has become a burden for Diane. Therefore, it seems that the results Diane and the network have achieved are not appreciated and recognised making it difficult for her. Although believing that the work is important and beneficial it is not enough to compensate for the lack of recognition and more importantly the open resistance the network has faced.

Since she sees her future to be in entrepreneurship even though she is not finding it easy, I ask her to tell me what are the best aspects of being an entrepreneur. It is no surprise that the answer is the laconic 'freedom'. Freedom for Diane means being able to work when her motivation is fullest and then take free time whenever necessary. This type of freedom when compared with working for employment could also be interpreted to say something about working conditions in organisations. It seems cu-

rious that organisations are still not capable of providing employees with flexible hours and measuring work results rather than working hours. Or is it that we are not ourselves prepared to fully use the opportunities available but we need to engage in the organisational practices of being present and visible in organisations to confirm that we are important?

After the 'freedom' talk Diane turns to the negative issues of entrepreneurship by describing it as 'truly temping' by using the current labour market discourse of the nuisance linked with temporary work. As an entrepreneur framed as a temporary worker one needs to tolerate the insecurity attached to the work and to trust that the next work assignment will come along. She does not understand the 'fabrication of entrepreneurs' in the society because it is not emphasised how much one does have to earn per month to make a living. Having experience of working as an entrepreneur and currently as an employee she describes how easy it is to be an employee, not having to worry about pension payments and emphasising the financial security linked with employment. Then she returns to the positive issues of being an entrepreneur that could be seen to compensate for the loss of financial security. As an entrepreneur it is possible to choose working partners and to do whatever interests and motivates the most. Doing exactly what one has a passion for and being able to sell that produces a feeling of success. It is these feelings of success and moments of revelations that are narrated as meaningful and important with regard to entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Diane portrays entrepreneurship as non-routine work where everyday is different. These positive ideas are then contrasted against the negative issues of feeling lonely, especially when she worked from home. This negative aspect she has solved through using her networks, by visiting regularly an organisation that she was connected with just to chat and to talk about projects in order to find out if she could provide them with her services. She also emphasises the meaning of having a computer and being involved in e-mail networks although some criticise that they do not solve the loneliness issue. This again is linked to the activities of the network.

Towards the end of the interview the resistance the network has received is revisited. The network tried to organise a seminar in regional development but it had to be cancelled due to a lack of interest. Diane herself understood this as a reflection of the mental depression in the region, but a male editor of a local journal explained to her that the local companies did not feel able to send anyone to the seminar because the seminar was organised by a female entrepreneurship network. Diane is a bit hesitant in accepting the explanation because she feels that it would be twice as outrageous, firstly, because the local companies and other in-

terest groups do not even realise the need for such a seminar but secondly, they choose to ignore it because of the organisers. Although refusing the explanation on one hand it is a possibility as it is an interpretation made by others not herself: *'But if that has been discussed in a male group then it must be so.'* Then Diane engages in a story to firstly provide support for the network and secondly to identify her personal role as regionally important. She explains that the same fifty men have participated in the seminars during the past thirty years without any visible results suggesting the need for changes in the group. Secondly, the women that are now being elected in the group represent leaders of large enterprises in the region, which she explains is the result of the criteria and values men have created for influential individuals (providing employment and investments). Diane, however, feels that her own role in developing the region and supporting and encouraging of female entrepreneurs is important, potentially more important than those who are normally considered 'influential female entrepreneurs' who act as managing directors for large companies. Their emphasis is not on regional development, they may even work outside the regions and their business activities are centred around exporting, i.e. the success or failure of the region as such is not important for the success of the business. On this occasion Diane defines female entrepreneurs as successful when they are capable of earning a living for their families especially in the region in question where unemployment remains high.

We return to the question of building an entrepreneurial future.

Ulla: *And now you feel you have found your place*

Diane: *Yes.*

Ulla: *In entrepreneurship...*

Since she has acquired contacts and networks and a lot of knowledge about female entrepreneurship she thinks she will be involved in it somehow in the future. The sudden change of life (the illness of her husband) has however made her rethink her values and she might be tempted towards more humanitarian work although continuing as an entrepreneur. Running the network frustrates her because the opposition it has faced has made her ponder why she should be a pioneer and lead this difficult project

The project will end in a few months and there might not be any private funding available to continue it. As the end of the project is already present in her story it is important for her to start negotiating her departure. She defines herself as the type that if one door is closing she starts to work on something new and she may then lack the motivation to

commit herself 100% to the old one. She contradicts this portrait with the comment that the project needs to be run till the end with 100% commitment. Her willingness to commit herself to the project is explained by her empathic character. She underlines the importance of sharing information even if the other person is in the same line of business because individual personalities, networks and skills to sell differ thus making competition a less important element. She takes herself as an example; if she does not know something but knows somebody who can help her, she will call that person for advice. It does not matter if the advice comes from a man or a woman except that for a female sole entrepreneur, for a small entrepreneur, the best mentor is a female entrepreneur. This she explains is because male entrepreneurs are less communicative than females, so dealing with a male entrepreneur necessitates a more aware and experienced counterpart 'of certain level' whom has experience of working with men to benefit from a male mentor.

6.4.12 Discussion on Diane's entrepreneurial identity

Diane builds her professional career story around the theory of six-year intervals. Every six years she has felt the necessity to do something new and challenging. Her professional history also comprises of shorter periods when she has accepted positions that have turned out to be disappointments for her. The theory also serves as the legitimiser for these 'foolish' career moves. When the radio station where she worked went bankrupt the period of unemployment following is labelled as a sabbatical to give it a new meaning of a much needed break. The 'in-between' jobs and the sabbatical are also constructed as a necessary boost to start exploring her true self as the entrepreneur she always had been.

The business develops into services offered to female entrepreneurs. The issues of gender, different categories of female entrepreneurs and family issues dominate Diane's story. She is herself a female entrepreneur providing services for female entrepreneurs and female entrepreneurs are opposing her services. Clearly the category— female entrepreneurs – cannot be treated as a uniform, homogeneous category as there are different female entrepreneur voices in the text. I am intrigued with the images of female entrepreneurs emerging from Diane's story. The female entrepreneurs that are her clients are mainly pictured as 'losers' not because of their own stupidity or fault, but because as women they are less self-assured (than men), and need more assurance and support. They are not equal to men but this inequality has been produced elsewhere. In Diane's professional career story her clients are assigned a dif-

ferent identity to the one she adopts herself. The female entrepreneurs are afraid of bureaucracies, men, and need a lot of assistance and help because they are not very professional or competent. I read Diane's overall story as a defence of her entrepreneurship and the type of business activity the company is engaged in. In the interview she constructs her business as a meaningful enterprise and in this way it is compared against the resistance she faces from entrepreneurs opposing her business. If her clients, the female entrepreneurs, were portrayed as less needy, the importance of her services and the value added could also be considered to be less. Although she distances herself from the entrepreneurs that are her clients, she also draws parallels with them. For example, she talks about her husband's illness and links it to the problems many entrepreneurs shared during the recession. Similarly, while identifying with the do-it-yourself women she does not share their unwillingness to share knowledge and skills. (See also Kennelly 2002 for a discussion on the ways females participate in shaping the system of gender.)

Although I share Diane's concern that the established, female entrepreneurs that oppose her services do so because they find seeking help demeaning and they want to maintain their competitive edge, I would like to look at other alternative explanations than the common belief that women find it more difficult to get along with other women than with men. The established women may have translated the targeting of women as a particular group as the reproduction of gendered practices (Silus 1995, 62). They do not accept Diane's construction of female entrepreneurs as insecure and needy especially when the category 'female entrepreneurs' includes them. By focusing on one group (the women-in-need) the other female entrepreneurs (the self-made-women) are being covered, and all female entrepreneurs are being grouped under the same umbrella. Diane identifies with the established entrepreneurs and accepts the identity of a successful 'do-it-yourself' female entrepreneur who is involved not only in promoting female entrepreneurs per se but also in contributing to the revitalisation of the region through this work. She is frustrated with the lack of recognition for her business and in the story takes the opportunity of creating a role for the network. In this way her own role is also depicted as regionally important although not recognised. Her own construction of female entrepreneurs implies that to be a strong, professional entrepreneur it is necessary to be more like a man. In order to be more like a man the talk of possible gender differences needs to be replaced by the gender-neutrality talk 'As a woman I have not needed any targeted female services'. It deals with the idea that concepts like re-

searcher and entrepreneur are neutral concepts and refer to all people (Silius 49-53).

Diane creates a strong professional identity for herself (she is a professional in marketing, she belongs to the group of 'self-made-women'). In a way Diane adopts the dual role as a career woman and a mother. As a parent she seems to locate herself in a fairly traditional role by taking the position of an attending parent (Meriläinen 2000). She bases many of her career decisions on the family situations or the opinions of her family towards these careers. This could be understood as a reproduction of the responsibility/caretaker rationality: the person acting with this rationality weighs and evaluates her own actions for other people against her choices. (Silius 1995, 57-58) It could be that the stereotypical representations of motherhood are limited – there are not many discourses to draw upon if a participant wants to present 'a good mother' identity. (Meriläinen 2000)

Diane's story as an entrepreneur or as a working person is also interwoven with her story as a mother and a wife. In this sense, her story is not that of a 'career woman' who has sacrificed her family because of her profession (although her career mobility has been criticised by her husband). She argues that certain jobs turned out to be a 'flop', as they did not fit her family circumstances. She has also defended her entrepreneurial identity at home by refusing to do small chores while working at home.

Although Diane agreed to be interviewed as an entrepreneur, she was in fact working as an employee in the project at the time of the interview due to family problems. In the interview the financial security and the comfort of receiving a salary is seen as a major benefit when compared with the financial insecurity of being an entrepreneur. Financial security is important for Diane. However being an entrepreneur brings greater freedom and this freedom is also important to Diane and sees she this as a major factor in being an entrepreneur in the future. She is tired of the resistance she has experienced in offering her services. The illness of her husband has changed her values and Diane believes that possibly in the future she will be developing new business ideas in the third sector or in other humanitarian sectors. Therefore, the illness of her husband is also present in the story in many ways by contributing to our understanding of the financial vulnerability of entrepreneurs and their difficulties in combining the challenges of personal and professional lives.

6.5 Marge's Story

Marge (43 years) has been an entrepreneur since the year 2000 and her business is in providing services for newspapers and magazines. Her decision to become an entrepreneur is linked to her dissatisfaction and the insecurity she encountered in the labour market and in organisational life.

6.5.1 Presenting the scene

I call Marge to set an appointment for our meeting. She has participated in another research project within our Institute investigating unemployed people that have received start-up financing (Lehto - Stenholm 2001). Hence when calling her to inform her that she has been handpicked from the survey respondents, I feel a bit uneasy. I do not want to label her as the representative of 'the unemployed' in my study, but given the background for my request it would also be unethical to hide the source that provided her contact information. Marge is hesitant at first 'I'm not saying that I am refusing to participate'. I try to be very positive and encouraging as in my student jobs in telesurveys and telesales I have learned that it is very important to be upbeat and positive on the telephone where the normal conversation voice might actually sound lame and even rude. As a result we agree to meet at her home that same week and I assure her that she can always postpone the interview if something urgent occurred.

When I ring the doorbell I hear a dog barking. Marge comes to open the door. Once she learns that I am not afraid of dogs (on the contrary) the black retriever is released from his captivity in another room and he comes to greet me. I feel that this already releases some of the tension because dog lovers bond easily with one another. However, before I formally start the interview (the clicking of the tape-recorder being the sign) we have some coffee in the living room upstairs, and I explain a little bit about my project. At this point Marge, who is well aware of the thoughts of the previous director of the entrepreneurs' association, asks me whether I share his view that the entrepreneur is an heroic person and whether I am striving to describe entrepreneurs as special people. I renounce these objectives and the interview begins.

Marge's story telling style involves quite long narrations and my involvement in the process is simply to offer some response-tokens (Silverman 1993, 126) such as 'mmms', nods or laughs which serve to indicate that I am listening. The narration is, therefore, quite one-sided, which is contrary to normal coffee table conversations, so I use the response-tokens to pass my turn to speak and urge Marge to continue. The

response-tokens ease the tension and the entrepreneur is not forced to speak to the tape-recorder alone while the interviewer is just listening. However, there are several occasions in the story where Marge feels that she has given enough information about a particular event or that she feels she has gone off at a tangent and gives me a direct indication to ‘ask for more’. Her questions could be understood as ‘exit talk’ to allow me to move onto the next question (Riessman 2002, 695).

This is the only interview that I had at a participant’s home and though it was pleasant in many ways as we could pat the dog and have a cup of coffee I did feel a little bit like an intruder at first. Also Marge’s husband had his office downstairs so I heard him go to his desk at least once during the interview. Luckily the apartment was large enough so our interview did not interrupt him, nor did his visit disturb us. Although I do not ask many questions in the interview, Marge’s narration is cued by my letter, which she uses to frame her story. She makes several direct references to it and to the concepts raised in it; like ‘*when it comes to identity*’ when she is making a note on her identity development so it seems clear that she is well prepared for the interview. For example, she sometimes addresses herself like ‘*what was the third thing again*’ indicating that she has thought over the process of becoming an entrepreneur and the related factors and events that she wants to tell me in the interview.

During the interview I emphasise strongly my dissertation study and my approach. It is only at the end that I turn to the notes from my colleagues to see if there are any remaining questions that would need to be asked in the framework of the Lehto – Stenholm (2001) study. This change of focus is visible in the interview. I am hesitant and my questions become more routineline ‘*Well I think I have covered all the questions regarding my dissertation but if I check these [questions of my colleagues] it seems we have also discussed these quite a lot in fact*’ (Ulla). In turn, Marge’s telling of the story also changes and the situation becomes more like a normal question and answer type of interview. This finding highlights that it is important how the interviews are prepared and how the interviewees are coached. In my letter I explained that my interest was primarily in the stories and my study relied on the narration of the entrepreneurs. Marge followed this cue and even remarked after the interview that ‘*I’ve been speaking so much*’ indicating that it may not be typical of her to talk extensively about herself but my letter had given her a direct indication to do so. Indeed, it would be quite uncomfortable to engage in such long ‘monologues’ if one was not coached to do so. Interviewees need to be prepared especially because in Western society peo-

ple tend to be socialised to question and answer type of interview situations (see also Samuel's story 6.8, p. 256).

6.5.2 Weighing and pondering upon the idea

When I ask Marge about how she decided to become an entrepreneur and where the idea came from she starts her story by telling of the 3-4 year thinking process that preceded the decision, emphasising strongly the role given to weighing the decision, evaluating the options and gaining courage. Marge's perception of herself is that she belongs to the group of entrepreneurs that are pushed into entrepreneurship (see also Mallon – Cohen 2001), which demonstrates that she is aware of the push and pull factors influencing the entrepreneurial decision making processes. Marge's story is focused on her anxieties and fears related to becoming an entrepreneur. A lot of energy is put into calculating, self-assuring, pondering whether she would have the nerve, whether the business idea is good enough, whether she could do enough marketing for the company to make it successful. In fact, this is the story I wanted to hear in my first interview (Rosemary, see 6.1, p. 115) and was utterly surprised when Rosemary told quite another story. During the analysis of Marge's story I discover that the reason why I wanted to hear a version of Marge's story is a very personal one. I think it would be my story of becoming an entrepreneur because I would also calculate, speculate and need to be reassured in the process. So, I wanted to hear my story of becoming an entrepreneur to see that one can firstly become an entrepreneur and secondly succeed as one despite all the anxieties.

Through the thinking process Marge convinces herself that becoming an entrepreneur is a feasible alternative for her. The reasoning is constructed into a narrative of her professional history and the dissatisfaction it created. She was working in the Littleborough News¹⁵ during the recession of 1994 and the economic circumstances resulted in strong pressure within the newspaper to cut costs. The organisation became a site of struggle where all the employees were engaged in a survival of the fittest type of battle where it was necessary to try to make oneself important and necessary within the organisation by downplaying the roles of others as less important and, hence, dispensable. Finally, there was a conflict between Marge and the editor-in-chief and Marge decided to leave the newspaper and move abroad with her husband to wait for the recession to abate. Although it was a risky decision to quit her job it is explained firstly by the unbearable situation at work and secondly by her belief ,

¹⁵ The name of the town 'Littleborough' is fictional as is the name of the newspaper.

which she frames by using a Finnish proverb: ‘*a laborious person will always find a job*¹⁶’. This reflects the general thinking in Finland before the recession and it is also informative of the shock Finnish people experienced when in the recession this truth no longer applied because even the most laborious, educated people were left without jobs. In addition, her husband was also unemployed, which facilitated her decision. Before the recession his construction company had been sold to a larger company where he remained as a manager. Due to the recession, however, he was made redundant from the company, which made it possible for the couple to work abroad for a year and return to Finland in 1995 only to find that the economic situation had not improved.

On her return Marge participates in a six-month computer course after which she receives a job as a substitute for a year through the Job Alternation Leave Experiment Scheme¹⁷. Then she takes a course in multimedia and the idea of setting up a company starts to develop. Although later she emphasises the journalist identity over the entrepreneurial one the existence of both is available through the long traditions within the industry of freelance journalists who work for various newspapers and magazines, so she still has a way of building an entrepreneurial identity from the journalist perspective.

Although in this sense Marge develops entrepreneurship as a feasible choice for her as a journalist, the issue of marketing and her ability to do it, or her willingness as a journalist to engage in marketing are made an issue in the story. For her marketing is especially in conflict with her journalist identity, her values and ways of thinking are rooted in the 1970s in the famously radical university she went to (see also Jonathan’s story 6.2, p. 139). When talking about marketing and the university environment of the 1970s Marge laughs aloud further emphasising the unthinkability of linking the two. There is, however, a curious distinction between *against-the-journalist-identity-marketing* and *accepted-marketing-of-your-skills*. From the freelancer perspective Marge finds it acceptable, for example, to go around and present herself, her experience and skills to the different newspapers and magazines informing them that she is available. In fact she later describes how she would like to invest more time in this aspect of marketing. The unacceptable form of market-

¹⁶ The proverb in Finnish is ‘Tekevälle aina työtä löytyy’. The proverb emphasises the entrepreneurial values of taking initiative and being active, which are seen as sufficient conditions to find a job. In this sense it is only lazy people who are left without a job for good reasons.

¹⁷ The term ‘job alternation leave’ means a system under which an employee is given fixed-term leave from the duties of his employment relationship in a job alternation agreement made with the employer, and the employer hires for the same period an unemployed job seeker registered with an employment office (Act on the Job Alternation Leave Experiment 22.12.1995/1663).

ing is not raised in the story but it could possibly deal with direct advertising or an active persuasion of customers to buy her services as opposed to providing information of the availability of her services.

6.5.3 Betrayal of the working life

The university background and the ‘different times’, which informed her values and thinking are emphasised in the story before returning to the practical situation preceding the start-up decision. After the multimedia course Marge receives a part-time, temporary job in another newspaper and she forgets the idea of becoming an entrepreneur. However, in the next phrase she says ‘*it [the idea of becoming an entrepreneur] was still there*’ and now in retrospect she thinks it could have been possible to start working towards this objective since she was working only part-time. As our interview proceeds I learn that this part-time job turns out to be a negative experience but also an important trigger for the setting up the company. Therefore, the retrospective view suggests that she might have avoided the negative experience by establishing the company at that point. However, she does not pursue the part-time entrepreneurship, which she explains by the increase in her working hours at the newspaper.

The turning point comes when the region faces an economic downturn, which results in a decrease in advertising and, therefore, cost savings are necessary at the newspaper. All temporary workers including Marge are made redundant. Although she has been unemployed before this is the first time that she has actually been given notice. At first she describes the event in a very impersonal manner – all temporary workers were laid off – later however, she describes this incident in a very personal way – that the editor-in-chief used her as the ‘first example of those people in the organisation’ that could go. This came as a shock to her and she felt betrayed which she describes through a metaphor of getting ‘a hot stone in her head’. As with Arthur’s story (6.7, p. 236) it seems important for the narrator to take the audience into the scene of the traumatic event by verbalising it as a very concrete event in order for the audience to really feel the hotness of the stone hitting one’s head and the related pain. The actual event – being laid off – is not sufficiently emotional or tangible to carry the feeling of the event. It is reduced to being a part of general management talk which we read in the media everyday.

So, again Marge finds herself unemployed and signs up for an entrepreneurship course targeted at potential entrepreneurs. Simultaneously she is offered freelance work in another newspaper as the result of a sick

leave vacancy. Thus, she is taking the course and working as a freelancer and she is also receiving an adjusted unemployment benefit. After the two-month course Marge makes up her mind and sets up the company. In her story this decision is supported by a multi-layered account of reasons and explanations. There are, firstly, the rational elements. Journalists are getting older along with the rest of the working population, which will result in increased sick leave, which provides work opportunities for freelancers in the media industry. So she refers to the business potential that made her believe in the rationality of her choice. She has already gained personal experience of this development when substituting for another journalist during the entrepreneurship course and this helped her to establish a major customer relationship. In addition, she has established relationships with several newspapers in the course of her professional career. It is these experiences that contribute to her belief that there is a need for a journalist like her with a depth and breadth of experience and expertise.

Secondly, she has applied for different jobs and has been interviewed for many. In one particular case she felt especially irritated where a young male graduate with less experience was chosen for a job she felt she would have been good at. These experiences led her to develop her personal theory that a woman in her 40s would not get a permanent job in the small town and region where she was living. Moving to another region is not an option as her husband now has a new business with contacts and markets in the region and due to his age (+50) is no longer in a position to start over somewhere else. This construction is similar to the other stories of female entrepreneurs in this study where the career decisions are reflected and constructed against family expectations and conditions. Although I have labelled the theory of women over 40 to be Marge's personal theory I do think that this was and still is a rather common understanding and practice in the Finnish job market. This is supported in Finland to the extent that the government created a special scheme 'National Programme on Ageing Workers 1998-2002'¹⁸ of which one of the aims was targeting employers to change their negative attitudes towards ageing job-seekers and employees. By labelling this as Marge's personal theory I want to emphasise that it is this guideline she uses to interpret the world and make her choices and decisions. From this perspective the idea of getting a permanent job is blocked from her and the remaining alternatives are either being hired for short-term contracts or becoming an entrepreneur.

¹⁸ <http://www.stm.fi/english/current/ageprog/index.htm>, search 27.8.2002.

The short-term employment contracts pose a problem for her identity. The meaning of a job or an organisation where one works extends beyond fulfilling the basic needs of earning money to live on and having something meaningful to do with one's time. Being employed in an organisation provides us with a social identity; 'My name is Mary Poppins and I am a member of this company'. Thus, having a social identity and to have personal control over that identity also contributed to Marge's sense making behind the decision to become an entrepreneur. As an entrepreneur she is no longer in a position that she needs to fear that position be taken away from her, nobody can come and drop the bomb on her. As an entrepreneur in the media business she is able to maintain a stable social identity:

That although in a way I am a sort of substitute and temporary worker it is in my own hands much more. I am this kind of media entrepreneur and because I offer my services I don't have to change who I am because of who I work for - this is exactly the stability I sought where you do constantly have to change who and what you are.

Although the above is narrated in the framework of providing reasons for the start-up it is less clear to what extent this was actually visible before the start-up or whether it is made into such retrospectively. In a similar vein, entrepreneurship also solves another problem, she no longer needs to work the hours and take all the responsibility for a particular area. Although this bonus of being an entrepreneur is given together with the other explanations and is constructed as a reason for her becoming an entrepreneur, this is something that has only dawned on her later, which she acknowledges in her story. This is the strength of narrative: the stories are narrated from the present enabling us to include new events in our life-stories and helping us to make sense of the events taking place from the current position by giving new meanings to those events. For Marge as an entrepreneur, it is liberating not to be on call '24 hours a day' and this bonus is woven into the narrative and dealt with as one of the reasons for becoming an entrepreneur. The idea of needing to work 24 hours a day echoes Eliza's story (chapter 6.3, 160) where Eliza renounced this demand which is often linked with entrepreneurship. In Marge's story becoming an entrepreneur makes it possible for her to be liberated from this demand.

Marge's entrepreneurial story is influenced by the duality of her views on employment. Her being a media entrepreneur is compared with the alternative of being a waged worker taking part-time jobs. In a sense her

business can be compared with that of someone taking consecutive part time jobs but the element of control is different. This point-of-view also comes through in her discussions about her financial situation as an entrepreneur, which she sees as being relatively good. Her aim is to earn as much per hour as a waged worker and she is happy to have achieved that. Overall, her income is less than when working as an employee but this in her story is compensated for by her working fewer hours and having more control.

Marge's frequent remarks that she has been offered jobs because of the ageing and illnesses of regular newspaper staff prompts me to question her if the issue of marketing that was previously presented as a dilemma for her journalist identity has been an issue at all. She confirms that it hasn't and explains that there have been a lot of situations where newspapers have needed an experienced journalist quickly. This has provided many job opportunities and she feels that having done a good job and been a reliable subcontractor for them, the newspapers have contacted her, not vice versa. In fact, she has had so many assignments that she has not been able to afford the time or energy to market her services, as she would have wanted to. She wants to expand the clientele base and not be dependent only on one customer, which she identifies as a risk. From this particular short story it is possible to identify the marketing/management talk with the notion of 'diversified clientele for risk-minimising purposes'. Although Marge refuses marketing values they seem to have pervaded her entrepreneurial story at least to some extent.

6.5.4 Reflecting on entrepreneurial identity

Marge talks about the general employment trends in the media industry and she finds herself sidetracked.

Marge: *But the...yes? **laughter** Ask me more, I've lost the thread. I cannot remember when I got lost.*

Ulla: *Well, yes. So, the first year has now past, have there been any surprises I mean regarding the entrepreneurship?*

Marge: *So that the things would have been more difficult?*

Ulla: *Yes, or if things were different than you expected?*

This extract demonstrates how the interviewees, like Marge, sometimes asked me to take part in the interviews as they no longer think they are recounting the things I want to hear and secondly how Marge's interpretation of surprises is that of difficulties or problems that she has encountered. The first year has, however, gone as planned which Marge

explains is the result of her long thinking process before the decision, legitimising it as a serious venture as opposed to foolish play and by the related entrepreneurial experiences (working as a freelancer) that prepared her for it. She has, however, been positively surprised by the long-term contracts that she has received as a freelancer because normally smaller newspapers cannot hire professional assistance but have to rely more on amateurs. This part of the story reinforces the identification of Marge as an experienced and professional journalist, which is the base from which the entrepreneurship story is also narrated. (See also Mallon 1998 for a discussion of management consultants who refuse to identify themselves as entrepreneurs.)

There is a pause to my question of what are the best things about being an entrepreneur. Then, the 'certain freedom' is given as an answer in Marge's story as in the other stories. The freedom in Marge's story does not refer to independence since she has been working independently and alone as a journalist covering a particular region or area but the freedom represents being free from expecting 'to receive the hot stone in her head' by using the same metaphor as when being laid off from the newspaper. This freedom is also extended to cover the notion of not being on call 24 hours a day and to be constantly alert to cover anything which might happen in the region which was part of the job description in her previous jobs. In her current position she is hired for particular work assignments and the rest of the time she is free to do what ever she wants, even nothing at all if she so chooses. She is responsible to nobody but herself which is a great relief to her. This is a reflection of Marge's experiences when working in organisations especially during financially difficult times where it was necessary to play the 'being busy and important member of the community' - game in order to portray an image of a good and efficient worker. This idea is further emphasised by Marge's personal reaction towards receiving start-up financing from the government. Although rationally finding it helpful she could not help feeling that she was living on government support, which required her to constantly inspect, if she was really exploiting the time usefully and beneficially. She felt she had to be busy at work all the time or otherwise she would be misappropriating the government funds. This she tells with laughter pointing at that she recognises the exaggeration of her thinking but yet she has to play the part in this play. It seems that work places in general have at least partially developed into theatres where being busy is a virtue admired over for example taking creative pauses or thinking.

Then Marge urges me to ask more and I make a general statement about her husband having a construction company. Marge describes the

business activities but engages in telling her own story from another angle as she tells about two young fellows working as subcontractors for her husband's business by wondering what provoked them into becoming entrepreneurs. She underscores the rationality of the current policy climate suggesting '*that people are being encouraged on too weak grounds to become entrepreneurs*'. At worst becoming an entrepreneur means falling outside 'all systems' without any social security. Thus, failing in the entrepreneurial endeavour will cast the person outside the safety net. This was one of the big fears for her as well but the entrepreneurship course helped reduce her fears of losing everything and being forced outside of the system as a result of discussions with the others on the course. The fears are given a new meaning by formulating them in new way: one needs only to find a job for 10 months to get back into the system. Thus, the fear is given a very pragmatic look; it is made manageable by the discussions within the course. In the framework of her personal theory it makes sense: 'although she will not find a permanent job she can feel quite positive about getting together 10 months from somewhere'. In addition, the fear is reduced by the lack of anybody depending on her financially as she does not have any children or other people to look after. The entrepreneurship course is important for Marge in two ways, it gives her courage and provides her with necessary skills. The latter also helps to reduce the risk element as in the course Marge learns to mould her idea into a business plan and through the evaluation process, the aims and possible outcomes are made visible, 'not to cheat oneself'. The risk is also reduced because she is not forced to make any major investments in the business that would make the company a financial burden. Thus, the meaning of the entrepreneurship course for Marge is manifold but most importantly it provided her with the tools that reduced the risks that she saw in going into the business. Quite clearly the fear of losing everything, falling outside of the safety net together with the fear of having no real business idea were big enough to serve as obstacles in the start-up process, which the course helped to mediate into manageable risks and viable opportunities. Then quite suddenly Marge says that:

*Surprisingly the biggest resistance came from home. Ulla: Hmm.. Marge: My husband found it difficult to understand that it was possible to work that way, that this sort of entrep... that it did not quite fit with his ideas of what business is about. In the construction industry it is totally different. He can't understand that it supports itself like this, that it is something where nothing material is being transported and the aim is to collect the salary money for oneself. So that for him it just did not feel like something **laughter***

that could work and succeed. And many times he explained how unrealistic my ideas were..., that no, no-one would pay for that, ...But at some point I got angry, and well, he hasn't said it again. Ulla: He believes already? Marge: Yes. That when in fact I get, I get a bigger part, a bigger sum that I can count as my own salary than t he took in his first years. [] This is like, what is the right word, selling expert services in a way. A little bit like one would be a lawyer or, or, some consultant, a bit like that.

Marge's husband is not able to imagine how Marge's business could be profitable or even reasonable when compared against the construction business 'where materials move, and a lot of action takes place'. Nevertheless, Marge has been able to earn more personal fees than her husband where much of the money is tied up, which helps her to stand up for her entrepreneurship. In addition, she identifies herself as a particular kind of entrepreneur – the media entrepreneur who sells expert services, similar to lawyers or consultants. This social category of not being just any entrepreneur, but expert service provider is thus helpful in producing her entrepreneurship as legitimate although it is largely different from her husband's business in construction.

The question of influential people for Marge's entrepreneurship comes not in the form of positive examples but of negative examples. The editor-in-chief in the former newspaper who spoke of Marge as the first 'unnecessary person that could easily be dispensed with' and even his previous attitude towards Marge 'as the temporary solution to solve a problem' are constructed as meaningful in Marge's story. Her father was an entrepreneur in the clothing business, which provided her with an understanding of what is involved. She was able to learn the sunny and cloudy sides of entrepreneurship but the example is presented as discouraging since her father was bitter about a strike that took place in the factory and never could quite forgive the shop steward for it. This Marge gives as an example for her unwillingness to pursue an entrepreneurial career in the first place and especially of employing other people. Currently Marge has some multimedia business ideas and in order to realise them she would need more people either through networking or hiring people. However, she still remembers the problems her father had as an employer and she is afraid of the potential conflicts that might follow. In addition, the financial risk would be bigger which is something she still needs carefully think through. On the other hand, Marge says that her confidence has grown during the first year of the enterprise. The period of calculating and pondering whether entrepreneurship was an option for her was time-consuming. Now that the decision has been made and the

business is running, there is energy left for other things, for example, thinking through and pondering on the potential next step for expanding the business.

Although she emphasises the journalist identity in the interview there are also traces of her determination to pursue the entrepreneurial career at least for a while. For example, she decides not to apply for a vacancy that opens in a local newspaper. Her explanation is that the job description is similar to one of her previous jobs so it would not have provided her with new challenges but she is also curious if her current business will take off before she engages in a new endeavour. This is, however, linked to her fear of exposing her new-found stable identity when she says ironically '*There were other reasons for it as well. I thought that if they don't choose me, how difficult is it for me then*'. However, at this early phase of her entrepreneurial endeavour she leaves the backdoor open. She is not clinging to the 'form of activity' (entrepreneurship) and the choice will be made case-by-case depending on the contents of the work and the ability to work reasonable hours. There is still room for her to leave the entrepreneurial position in favour of going to work as an employee in a newspaper.

6.5.5 Re-building the journalist identity

Throughout Marge's story it is possible to see that she wants to emphasise her identity as a journalist and to downplay the entrepreneurial identity. It becomes visible for example through her visits to her customers where she has no real reason to visit other than to create business opportunities but also to create a sense of a working community and belonging to a social group. The role of marketing is mentioned when Marge speaks of her involvement in the journalist union where she regularly participates at different events and courses. These are opportunities for her to discuss job-related issues and maintain professional contacts and to display her journalist identity over the entrepreneurial one. On the contrary she has not sought membership of the entrepreneurs' association but is expecting them to contact her. She would not mind belonging to the association although she does not need it to fulfil the void of a working community. In addition, she draws a distinction between herself and some of the entrepreneurs 'that she does not necessarily want to be involved with', that share different values and thinking. She does not identify herself with the 'tales from the field', the ideological propaganda.

That entrepreneurs are always oppressed that everything goes wrong and times are awful and everything is so grim. There is a

little bit of negative spirit and then the spirit that entrepreneurs are in a specific position of being a lot more oppressed than other groups, that entrepreneurs have to work a lot and you cannot ever take holidays and you are not within any [systems]. I can really see where these issues come from but I am not altogether convinced that it is the whole truth.

The opportunity of having contacts through the association (marketing) is, however, compelling to her. She is not ready to accept the ideology, which she parallels with the ideology put forward by the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners but she would participate in some of the more practical activities. She also refuses the image of entrepreneurs as special personalities or people by broadening ideas of working hard and in a responsible way to cover other forms of activity including her own in her previous positions and to the public sector:

I have as a wage earner worked entrepreneurially as I am now and received just a cold hand in return that I don't... That it cannot simply be that the line that entrepreneurs or somebody else would be only... that if somebody works for the municipality that he would be much different, he does his job well or badly, or feels his responsibility or not but it is the same for everybody so the curious glorifying [of entrepreneurs] that has been in the forefront, I shun that a little bit.

However, she thinks that it is important to take care of personal interests, for example the taxation or holiday systems could still be improved. It seems that unlike most of the other entrepreneurs in this study Marge rejects the idea of entrepreneurs as a special group that share the qualities of bearing full responsibility and working harder than other groups, which would largely distinguish entrepreneurs from other professional groups. This makes sense from the identity position adopted by Marge being more on the journalist than the entrepreneurial side. It is possible for her to ridicule some of the activities and claims of entrepreneurs by not totally or exclusively inhabiting that particular identity position.

6.5.6 Constructing a positive future

One year after the launch Marge is fairly pleased with the company and is confident about the future. She has convinced herself that she can make it as an entrepreneur, which has given her opportunity and space to think about the future and develop new plans for the future. In our interview we discuss the need for a working community that might be difficult to

achieve as a sole entrepreneur. Marge does not accept that it is a problem for her personally as she is used to working independently and alone as a journalist. Later, however, she takes up the issue and presents her idea of establishing an office hotel where knowledge-based entrepreneurs like her could gather and meet up in order to develop contacts and perhaps new business ideas. The issue of a multimedia project idea is brought up again. The idea of joining with other entrepreneurs in a joint-project is considered but a very careful approach is taken.

I have this one multimedia project idea and there is the possibility that an enterprise house might be built in Demiville. I have some multimedia ideas for a tourism project, which some people I know are engaging in and I could try something together with them, there is ...or at least I'll try to follow up any opportunities it might bring along.

She is constructing the future as an optimistic one as opposed to her prior pessimistic views that were influenced by her discouraging experiences as a temporary worker and an unemployed person, which make it easy for her to still identify with and understand the bitterness that the unemployed feel against the world. The year of being in entrepreneurship is constructed as a meaningful one in that it has been influential in the sense of building her confidence *'if you had asked these questions a year ago I would have been somewhat grimmer or at least much more insecure'*.

6.5.7 Discussion on Marge's entrepreneurial identity

Unemployment or losing one's job were behind Rosemary's, Diane's and Marge's decisions to become entrepreneurs. However, unemployment and its importance for entrepreneurship are constructed quite differently in the narratives of these three entrepreneurs. Becoming an entrepreneur for Marge was not an easy or a natural decision, rather it was something she tried to avoid.

From all of the entrepreneurs interviewed, Marge has the most difficulties in accommodating the entrepreneurial identity although she has accepted it as a way of solving problems. Marge's choice for becoming an entrepreneur, a self-employed person, resonates with Mallon and Cohen's study (2001) where women emphasise the 'push' factor – dissatisfaction and disillusionment within the organization they had previously worked for triggered the idea of becoming self-employed. She sees that the journalist identity of which the roots were laid in university and that

of the more recent entrepreneurial identity are hard to combine. Through her education and work experience she identifies as a journalist and refutes the ideas and values linked with entrepreneurship. The need for and resistance to marketing is taken as an example of the difficulty of accommodating it to her journalist identity. Yet, in the story there are also traces of how marketing talk has pervaded her story possibly due to her attendance on the entrepreneurship course and her being in business for a year.

Although working hard and in a responsible way she was not able to find her place professionally as a journalist. The economic crisis that the country faced in the early 1990s' drove newspapers to cut down costs. As a result the work place turned into a site of struggle where the individuals engaged in survival of the fittest types of games trying to assure their own worth for the organisation by downplaying others as dispensable. It is a commonly found phenomenon that organisational politics, being a complex mixture of power, influence and interest-seeking dominates individual activity in the workplace, causing job distress (e.g. Vigoda 2002). Temporary workers are especially considered dispensable and they are the first to go in times of economic difficulties. Marge's ageing also causes her to believe that she will no longer find a permanent job but is forced to take only temporary jobs where the fear of losing her position is always present, thus, presenting a constant threat to her professional, social identity (see also Lindgren– Wåhlin 2001). Yet, even as a temporary worker she was still required to be on call 24 hours a day and ready to report if something interesting should happen in her area. Therefore, the journalist identity that is being constructed and emphasised by Marge is at risk. The solution she finds to overcome the problems presented above and to preserve her position as a journalist in a meaningful way is by going into a business of her own, thus, adopting the entrepreneurial position. This could be linked to the study of other 'strong' professions, such as medical doctors and lawyers. Increasingly for example medical doctors are taking over more and more managerial but also entrepreneurial functions and roles. Although there is a long tradition of private practices of medical doctors this 'dual role' situation seems to be changing – many of the private practices today are engaged in rather aggressive marketing, and thus the roles of the medical doctor is changing and the two need to be mediated and given new meanings (Llewellyn 2001).

The entrepreneurial identity is adopted as a means of trying to create a sense of security and stability for her social and professional identity. Paradoxically the entrepreneurial identity is constructed as a means to safeguard the journalist identity, to be able to work as a journalist in an

environment where there is not a constant pressure of fearing the worst, of being dismissed, of being a victim of corporate reorganisations, she can find a secure and stable identity as an entrepreneur in the media business. The way to accommodate the two identities in Marge's story seems to be related to her finding a way of identifying as a certain kind of an entrepreneur – a knowledge-based entrepreneur in the media business providing expert services as opposed to other kinds of entrepreneurs, such as in the production or construction businesses.

Furthermore, she renounces some of the values and thinking in the entrepreneurship propaganda, for example, from understanding entrepreneurs as a special, heroic group by making it plain that she has shared the entrepreneurial values of hardworking and strong sense of responsibility as an employee. The entrepreneurship is a solution for Marge to take her professional destiny into her own hands; being an entrepreneur is a position that cannot be taken away from her by others. This discovery together with noticing that she can support herself and succeed as an entrepreneur has made her adopt a much more positive view of the future than as a temporary worker or an unemployed worker.

6.6 Timothy's Story

Timothy (age 33) has set up a software company with three other students. At the time, 1995, the country was recovering from the severe recession of the early 1990s. There were limited job opportunities even for business graduates, which influenced Timothy's decision to become an entrepreneur. Currently Timothy has one partner with whom he runs the business with 6-7 employees.

6.6.1 Presenting the scene

When looking for participants for my study I talked frequently to my colleagues (See also Jonathan's story 6.2, 139). As a result a colleague asked if I wanted to talk to his friend Timothy and volunteers to inquire if he is interested in participating in the study. After Timothy's acceptance it takes me a couple of months before I find the time and energy to call him and to set up the meeting. Timothy suggests that we could meet the same week '*to get it over with*'. He also volunteers to come to our office because in his office we would disturb and be disturbed by his business partner. Timothy also asks me to invite my colleague to have coffee with us. I agree and I send Timothy my letter of instructions.

On the day of our meeting I go and welcome Timothy at our information desk. I recognise having seen him in the university during my student years. Timothy is a dark-haired, sporty guy who laughs a lot and possesses an ironic undertone. I escort him to our meeting room and we sit at the oval table and have some coffee. My colleague has forgotten about the meeting and I am not able to reach him so we go ahead with the interview. In the very beginning Timothy says that he has really tried to think what made him want to become an entrepreneur, hence, referring to my letter and my interest area. This is the first indication of Timothy's wish to accommodate my intellectual needs and to give a truthful and honest account of becoming an entrepreneur and this forms the thread of his overall story. In the interview he asks several times if he is providing me with the answers I am interested in. Similarly, in the interview there are also several occasions where Timothy directs me to ask questions and to really dig out of him what interests me.

Timothy: Do you have any questions? I am very good at rambling in my talk...

Ulla: Yes, I have.

Timothy: Because you know what you do not know...

Ulla: Mmm.. yes

Timothy: What would you like to hear? I'll try to reply honestly. If you're interested in something.

It is important for Timothy to give an honest account that fills in my information gaps. He refuses to tell a fictional story and uses a lot of irony and humour throughout the interview. Verbal irony is often seen to perform a very pragmatic function as it makes use of a potential contrast between the expected and experienced events. (Colston et al 2000, 1557, Hatch – Ehrlich 1993, Hatch 1997)

He also pushes me away from my active listening position to participate in a discussion of entrepreneurship studies for business graduates and in a general debate of how to increase interest among business students in entrepreneurship as we are both graduates from the same school sharing the same experiences. I am also able to provide him with some information about the latest developments at the school that he finds interesting.

Sometimes he lowers his voice and those parts are quite blurred on the tape so transcribing this particular tape is extremely laborious and I am not able to catch everything. After the interview I call my colleague again who now comes to greet Timothy. They start discussing their plans to meet over some weekend and I decide to leave them alone.

6.6.2 Starting up in the aftermath of the economic recession

The economic situation at the time of the start-up is described as having had a strong influence on Timothy's decision to become an entrepreneur. Timothy, in the final phases of his studies, does not have many job opportunities, thus, he claims that he had nothing to lose by entering into entrepreneurship. As an illustrative example of the alternative, he describes how his friend got a job that was terribly poorly paid and involved moving to the capital city. In this way Timothy uses the salary of his friend and the need to move to describe the poor alternative and becoming an entrepreneur is constructed as a sensible option when compared with being paid 7000 marks per month and having to live in Helsinki.

The idea of getting into entrepreneurship is raised by a friend, Peter, who thinks it is a good idea to set up a business. Timothy leaves unsaid his role in the decision although previously he introduced the lack of opportunities as an important factor. In a sense the responsibility for the decision is given to a friend. Timothy is finalising his studies and is faced with the lack of (attractive) career options elsewhere, so when Peter presents the idea, Timothy accepts it because he feels he has nothing to lose. Subsequently, however, Timothy retrospectively believes that entrepreneurship is in his character by identifying as a perfectionist who is used to taking responsibility for his own activities and is a bit allergic to people interfering with his decisions and actions. Similarly, he portrays himself to be unable to work in stiff, hierarchical organisations where good deeds go unrewarded whereas bad jobs may be accidentally rewarded. Thus, entrepreneurship seems to give him access to fair play. *'It felt right to accept the responsibility of my own deeds'*. It is interesting how Timothy, who is just graduating from university, and has not personally experienced the disillusionment of working life as Jonathan and Marge had, still however, applies it as a resource in constructing his story. This suggests that it is possible to apply the experiences of other people to construct one's story.

Timothy does not want to, or cannot name any persons or issues that have influenced his becoming an entrepreneur. He emphasises the importance of having found a way to be free and to cherish the power and responsibility over his own activities, hence, adding another aim that is being fulfilled through entrepreneurship and pursuing the entrepreneurial career. On this occasion Timothy also renounces the quest of getting rich as a primary goal for the business. On the contrary, making a living and receiving reasonable compensation for his efforts are constructed as a

meaningful and sufficient goal in financial terms. Renouncing the ideal of getting rich is, however, an important theme in Timothy's story and a resource in constructing it. It seems that the industry has an image of entrepreneurs getting rich, which is so strong that Timothy is forced to integrate it into his story.

Later in the interview I return to the four partners that were involved in the company in the early days, and Timothy introduces them; Peter, the partner who had the original idea, William, who is still a partner in the company and who already previously had a small business and some experience in multimedia and Jim, a guy from the university who understood the data side of the business. In addition, there were a lot of people in the network who worked for the company, which resonates with Jonathan's story of his early years in the business (6.2, p. 139). Quite soon, however, Peter and Jim decide to quit the company, which Timothy explains was because of the huge amount of work it involved and the relatively poor financial return for their efforts. The low profitability was the result of the recession, which made customers reluctant to make any investments. Timothy applies the expression of 'the guys throwing the towel into the ring' of the two partners leaving the company. This boxing metaphor provides a powerful image of the early years of the company: of the fight where it is necessary to be tough and persistent to make it and two of the four who are not tough enough but give up.

Towards the end of the interview we return to the theme of the start-up as a result of Timothy's urge to provide me with interesting information. He ends his story with a sharp demand:

Timothy: *More questions?*

Ulla: *I don't know if I have any...*

Timothy: *What do you want to hear?*

Ulla: *What would I want to hear? I have heard...*

Timothy: *Is this so uninteresting. You know, it so difficult because this is just like...life. Same kind of job as yours. In a way. C'mon, ask something!*

Ulla: *Ask! laughter*

Timothy: *Or think if you have any questions. I can answer very detailed questions if I know the answers.*

Ulla: *Well... Well, we did go rather quickly through the early days of the company.*

In this interaction I try desperately to assure Timothy that he has given me interesting and valuable information but as he is insistent that I should ask something more, dig deeper, I finally try to accommodate his

wish by revisiting a theme that we have already discussed. In this way the interview contains many layers of data. So, we revisit the start-up phase again in the interview. It is Peter, the former business partner, who found the partners for a project they already had running thus, the image of Peter's key role in the start-up is again underlined. One of the partners, William, already had a small business at the time, which gave the endeavour a more professional look albeit acknowledging that in the beginning the company was involved in making a lot of Internet sites for very little money, which assigns the business to the amateur league.

6.6.3 Learning entrepreneurial skills

Before setting up the company Timothy worked for his brother-in-law's company. In the midst of recession Timothy emphasises that business was terrible. The devaluation of the Finnish mark made imported products really expensive for end-customers and caused many enterprises to go bankrupt. While the period was not good for the business, Timothy, however, enjoyed the marketing activities, which he parallels it to the current entrepreneurship by noting that both are dependent on one person, which builds on the theme of responsibility, an important theme in Timothy's story. For Timothy, it is rewarding to close deals and selling products is more fun than selling services. Hence, the former job and the current activities are compared again. The fun of selling products is explained by the differences in the nature of the business: in his previous sales job, products were sold from the warehouse and afterwards if there were any problems, other people were responsible for them. In the service business, in project-based work it is not even possible to define exactly when sales are closed. Customers can have a lot of expectations and raise lots of issues at various points and although projects are split into smaller phases that need to be approved, it is only in the end of the project when its profitability can be assessed. This Timothy identifies as one of the downsides of entrepreneurship, which at a later phase is connected to difficulties attached in calculating and invoicing for projects.

During his studies Timothy also worked as an accountant, which was similar to the work experience he gained in marketing and formed the base for his professionalism, together with his studies at the business school. For Timothy the university studies are an important source of confidence, and he weaves this into his story. Being analytical, his work experiences provide him with expertise in financial, legal and administrative issues which he believes are necessary qualifications to work as a CEO, thus, providing the legitimisation for his current business and his

entrepreneurship. In his story Timothy frequently uses the term ‘CEO’ as opposed to the term ‘entrepreneur’, possibly because the former is more familiar to a business graduate. The experiences acquired during his university years are meaningful because they provide Timothy, firstly, with a glimpse of life running a small business and of the enjoyment derived from being responsible for and understanding the overall process and secondly with the needed skills to act as an entrepreneur. Nevertheless, as with Diane and Rosemary he renounces the idea of doing everything himself, his skills and knowledge give him the basic understanding of these activities but he believes he should concentrate on the core activities.

6.6.4 Constructing meaning for Timothy’s business and entrepreneurship

Towards wealth or aiming at perfection?

The goal of getting rich and the worthiness of this goal are applied as resources in Timothy’s story. Timothy refutes the idea that he ever thought of becoming a rich man through entrepreneurship. He feels that becoming rich is not something worth aiming at. Paradoxically, he identifies this to be a negative issue as it demonstrates that he lacks the motivation to expand the firm or to drive the firm to improved profits. It is as if Timothy interprets these goals to be the ideals of a business graduate but he separates them from his own goals. As an alternative to getting rich Timothy’s main aim is making good quality products with the money available. Although this is not always possible due to the competition that sometimes forces him to cut the corners, the quality of the work and the rewards that are linked with the pride attached to producing services of good quality and of durable value are constructed meaningful in Timothy’s story. The problem, however, remains that in his line of business – software - the products are not very durable and profitability and efficiency are values that count, framing the boundaries to the quest for good quality. In order to make visible the economic pressures he faces when aiming at quality he parallels his anxieties with my research work: *‘How would you feel if somebody said of your research work that this is finished now although you know yourself you could do it so much better’*. Throughout the interview Timothy makes these kinds of parallels between his work (entrepreneurship) and my work (research). It may be interpreted as a way of bridging the seemingly separate worlds, showing that there are elements that we can both identify with and, therefore,

communication between the two of us is possible and meaningful. Timothy's expressed wish is to give a truthful, honest account gives meaning to his use of the parallel examples. It is his way of assuring that I understand his account from my own point-of-view.

Former hype industry towards the better future

In Timothy's story the company began its early days by operating in an unhealthy market. Currently, Timothy is relieved that the industry has changed for the better due to the recession in the financial markets that has limited the free money flowing in. This has led to the collapse of the IT sector, which has had the beneficial effect of ridding the sector of much of the hype that surrounded the sector in the 1990's. As a consequence many of the people and organisations that shouldn't have been in the market in the first place have now gone to the wall. This construction of the events surrounding the recession helps Timothy to distinguish between those unrealistic companies full of people living on the hype, and only interested in short term gains, and his own business and related goals. Timothy describes the current market situation as healthier with more humble customers as a result of the disappearance of competitors who worked with heavy external financing without generating any profits. As an example of the unhealthy times, Timothy describes how the heavily financed competitors tried to seduce the employees of Timothy's company during weekends by calling them at home and offering them bigger salaries. At a later phase Timothy admits that the success of such an endeavour could have been a major loss for the company, but he refuses to acknowledge that it would have been the end of it. Yet, there are signs of the hype diffusing into Timothy's company: '*When pizza guys and employees start making business plans*' ... Timothy constructs a reality where the hype is made visible in his company by the employees getting restless, looking around for better opportunities, trying to speculate and optimise the best situation while waiting for something great to happen just around the corner.

Not only has the industry changed for the better but also Timothy's business is now more professional than before which is demonstrated by the tools applied and the seriousness they attach to the business. (See also Eliza's story 6.3, p. 160 and description of her first company). Timothy currently describes the business as sensible, making a distinction between now and the time it was set up. He explains that they have been involved in the business for a long time by making comparisons with other companies in the field and although the company is a small business it has

been able to attract good customers and to produce good products. The company targets large companies that need some tricky, not basic solutions because of their bigger budgets for IT and wider understanding of the benefits of developing the systems. The company has survived by being flexible and by providing a hassle-free service rather than standardized packet solutions like many of its competitors. This is the distinction Timothy makes between his company and its competitors: Timothy's company aims to provide good quality service to the customers while the competitors are interested only in selling standardised services in order to generate profits.

Entrepreneurship: Fun and coca-cola – and routines

When I ask Timothy about his job and what it involves he replies that much of it is a lot of meaningless rubbish, routines and sometimes fun. The fun part is dealing with the many customers of the company so there is always a new learning opportunity. In addition, the joys of communicating with bright intelligent people, with the directors and managers of companies, bringing in expertise and finding solutions for the customers are also the fun part of the business. By comparison, invoicing and pricing of projects are presented as a total hell. The company does not want to lose money by establishing fixed prices for services that are inflexible and do not account for changes that result from the growing appetite of the customers. Their current pricing structure provides opportunities for the company enabling them to sell projects in self contained small units. This, however, makes the invoicing very difficult and it cannot be delegated. In addition, as '*the CEO of a small kiosk*' Timothy finds it quite frustrating that it necessitates him to deal with and react to small issues, which makes it impossible for him to plan his working day. The image given is a preference for dealing with the big issues while it is the small tasks that consume his day.

At this point Timothy loses the track of his story and asks me to redirect him: *You asked what is not nice in my job? Oh, what belongs to my job...* Timothy continues his story by saying that talking to the clients is a part of his job, answering their enquiries, mapping their needs, doing sales work to find out whether the customer has a problem that Timothy's firm can solve. In bigger projects Timothy is solely responsible until the project is defined. This story is followed again by a point of negotiation: '*I'm not sure whether you can get anything out of this...?*' that demonstrates Timothy being sceptical whether his account of his work will pro-

vide me with the information I need. He does not believe that his verbal accounts can fully transfer the meaning and understanding of his work.

On another occasion in the interview Timothy draws my attention back to our institute and the opportunities his business could provide for us: *'You could say to your colleagues that we could develop your web services, to add value to your research work. What do you say, do we have a deal?'* So, suddenly Timothy jumps into the salesperson role and assigns me in the customer role and identity. The reason for such a jump might be that he feels it is a better way to demonstrate the kind of work he does which he feels unable to convey successfully by describing it. Later, he describes the fun part of his work to be in helping people to understand how they could improve their multimedia services even if the customer is not ready to buy anything at all.

It is also interesting how the customer identity, which Timothy pushes me into, makes me feel that I should abandon my active listener position and to reply to his direct question;

Ulla: We are not prepared to buy in somebody else to think for us, because we do things ourselves – we place no value on our own time so if we think about things ourselves, that is for free.

Then, however, Timothy shifts from the salesperson position to the research participant position and states that this attitude is also typical of entrepreneurs in general. He continues to speak about his work and the related pains of being in the person responsible for the routines in the company in order to ensure that things run smoothly. Timothy explains that delegating the dull routines is difficult because, firstly, there are not enough routines to hire an employee to take care of them solely, and secondly, the employees who would be good at dealing with the routines are not interested in them. From this Timothy jumps to the selling strategy of the company: the aim of the company is to sell a small amount of work, to be able to better define the customer needs and to set a price for that rather than to have the customers to pay millions to a top consultant who claims to know what the customer needs. This again emphasises the distinction between his competitors and Timothy's business. Timothy identifies this to be the wrong, immoral, way of doing business because in the beginning nobody understands what needs to be done, and this is also the reason why it is difficult to use temporary or other help in the business. The employees, the sales persons, are not motivated to sell small projects that might or might not result in bigger deals in the end, i.e. they are not motivated to wait for the provisions on the long-term, which would fit the company strategy.

Towards the end of the interview we return to the pleasures and pains of being an entrepreneur. Sometimes as an entrepreneur Timothy acknowledges that it is necessary to do the urgent, relatively unimportant things thus returning to a theme introduced earlier. Even if they are really annoying ‘*there are piles of shit coming to my desk all the time*’ Timothy, however, acknowledges responsibility for taking care of these issues in order to not lose money. At this point, Timothy adopts an ironic tone and says ‘*I came here not to help you with your studies but to complain... laughter Shrinks are too expensive!*’ Thus, he suggests the role of a therapist for me as a researcher although with a humorous undertone underlining that for him talking about negative issues is complaining and whining and should be reserved for the therapist – client relationship, not for the researcher – participant relationship. Then Timothy continues with the ironic tone: ‘*The fun part of my work deals with making trips abroad with clients. It is fun and is part of being an entrepreneur. The unpleasant thing is paying the bills from those trips. No, there is very little public relations in the job.*’ In this passage there is a contradiction that is marked with the ironic tone. He constructs his reality as an entrepreneur by contrasting it to the flashy life of flying around and being busy that is expected by business graduates, or the ideal cherished among business graduates. In the end, Timothy wants to make sure that I get his irony and understand the actuality of the business, that it is not about public relations and promotion.

As a further example of the positive sides of the business Timothy describes a potential case of coming to talk at our institute where he addresses us as clients again. In the scene he tells us how we could improve our multimedia services and if we give positive feedback to him even without ordering anything, that is fun for Timothy. Thus, transferring of knowledge and getting feedback, communicating with the clients and finally providing a good quality service are revisited as the important elements in Timothy’s entrepreneurship. These are contrasted against the running of the company, which is depicted as boring and time-consuming and in a sense unrelated to the actual production side of the business. In order to increase my understanding he parallels it to research work: ‘*It is rewarding to have a research project finished, not applying for grants that take more time than finishing the study. It must be humiliating, demotivating, boring...*’ Then Timothy reflects that maybe the routines are boring because he has been an entrepreneur for some years and feels he is too skilled for that kind of work anymore. The routines were not so boring in the beginning demonstrating awareness of the changing preferences that have taken place in his entrepreneurial career. Then he turns to

another issue that he identifies as a negative side of the business, that is dealing with customers' complaints. From an employee's perspective complaints can be interpreted to be the as the customers' faults but from an entrepreneur's perspective they need to be understood to be the company's fault i.e. the customer is always right even when they are wrong. Here, Timothy makes the distinction between employees and himself by acknowledging the company's responsibility for customers' disappointments.

6.6.5 Human resources

Employees as the cornerstone of the company

Timothy describes the company as open, where all members of the organisation are on friendly terms but at the same time he assigns employees to a particular role in the company, for example, finding it a bit too much if employees start making suggestions for further investments. The volatility of the industry can also be seen in the employees: employees have left the company to work elsewhere, which is presented as unfortunate because it is only through experience an employee gains the necessary skills and knowledge. Continuing this idea Timothy describes the role of the company as an educator of knowledgeable employees who are subsequently hired by larger companies. This is constructed as a good move for the employee and possibly also for Timothy's company but at the time of the transfer it can be difficult. Currently some of his former employees have enquired whether it is possible to come back but this Timothy acknowledges is morally difficult because new people have been hired and because he wants to demonstrate loyalty towards employees who have not chased after the big money. The importance of the employees is emphasised in describing the whole industry as totally dependent on the employees. As an example, even in larger companies if a whole team leaves, the company may not be able to do what it has promised or it will take ten times longer than expected.

Currently the company employs six full-time employees on monthly salaries, two who work on an hourly basis and one sales person works on commission. In addition, the company normally has at least one trainee in order to find new good employees for the future which is emphasised as difficult through a numerical example: out of 30 trainees normally 1-2 are good employees, which underlines the difficulty. The difficulty of finding good employees is further intensified in Timothy's theory; basic education is important but to be a good nerd one needs to devote oneself

to it, like to research. The last part is again applied to make me understand the importance of the need for devotion.

Then Timothy adopts a humorous, tone when saying that the company has survived because of its wonderful, skilful employees. Irony is used to mark the contradiction – something being said when actually meaning the other – e.g. in the phrase ‘oh, there’s no queue here’ when actually the queue is enormous. However, in this case it seems that Timothy’s irony is not targeted at saying that the employees are not wonderful or skilful. This interpretation is derived from the overall story and it demonstrates that the use of irony and humour needs to be interpreted from the overall account not just individual remarks. Timothy’s humorous remark could be understood to demonstrate his knowledge of management speak where the phrase ‘people are companies’ main assets’ is currently exaggerated and he does not want to express clichés of this sort although he really thinks it is true. This is understood in the context that employees who wait for work to come to them will not make it in the company (see also Samuel’s story 6.8, p. 256), therefore, emphasising that the current employees are dynamic and proactive and that their knowledge and know-how make the company competitive. For example, the company does not take seven people to meet a customer because the customer is clever enough to understand that someone (the customer) pays for the costs. Then Timothy talks about the skilful experienced firms that are not the biggest or the most visible companies but who work silently but efficiently with their customers. It seems that Timothy assigns his firm this particular identity.

The employee remuneration issues are also discussed in the interview. For the beginners Timothy pays an hourly salary closely linked to the work to verify the motivation of the employee as this type of remuneration suits a person who is committed and responsible. Timothy does not think monthly salaries are motivating because both paying too much or too little does not enhance motivation and a monthly salary is not an incentive for an entrepreneurial activity. However, calculating a bonus-based salary or even having a reporting system is difficult because when employees understand the system, they start manipulating the results even if the system does not have any effect on their salary. Timothy adopts an ironic tone and says ‘*maybe we should pay them a hell of a big salary and then be really shitty to them. We are not like that, we are all friends among us*’. He applies the irony but then reaffirms that I understand his comment is a humorous one, not a real one.

Timothy as a coach

As a manager Timothy identifies as a ‘coach or teacher’ who avoids very brisk methods in human resource management. His management style relies on the method of suggesting that the employee could do better as opposed to giving commands or orders. The chosen management style is explained by saying that ‘*everybody in the company is an expert*’ at the same time making fun again of management speak and by portraying the impossibility of a more authoritative management style. Nevertheless, sometimes there is a need to redirect work, for example a need to prioritise one job over another although it might upset the customer. At this point Timothy applies the metaphor of raising children to managing employees and explains the metaphor by saying that employees need to be given responsibility, to be raised and developed into people with self-respect. Even the management can sometimes admit to making mistakes, thus, drawing parallels between the employee – manager and the parent – child relationships.

Timothy describes his method of leadership to be of thinking things through together. Interestingly, he acknowledges that he would be a different kind of manager if his employees were filling shelves in a warehouse but since the sales activities are strongly dependent on feelings it is not possible to give orders and boss people around. Furthermore, his employees are described as intelligent people who cannot be managed by announcing decisions. As a manager it is necessary to participate in the activities, thus, managing by example rather than by orders. As an example of the industry specific challenges regarding management, Timothy talks about how the coders also need challenges implying that as a manager one is also responsible for developing people's work.

On the other hand, employees do not always have realistic ideas of working life (see also the story of Samuel). For example, if a project is finalised one day, the employee may think they have the right to take a day off the next day. This is a particular problem in Timothy's business and shows that many employees do not have a previous idea let alone experience of working life and of any job before. This image portrays the employees as very young representing the X-generation who no longer possess the protestant values of hard work. Timothy combats this by taking a parenting role to educate his employees about the responsibilities of work life.

Team entrepreneurship

To my enquiry of the relationship with his business partner Timothy answers that it has gone surprisingly well. They have managed to operate successfully during a difficult economic period, which demonstrates the success of the partnership. The surprise element of their success is contrasted with Timothy's principle that nobody should take partners in their businesses. The success is further explained by the complementary nature of their skills so that they have needed each other. If the partnership comes to an end the decision will be made jointly between them. Interestingly, Timothy emphasises that he is counting on the fact that his partner will not just suddenly leave by claiming that in principle he does not count on anything or anybody, but he counts on this. It suggests that the business partnership is a very emotional bond where one needs to be personally involved which also explains why Timothy is sceptical about team entrepreneurship in the first place. This is further exemplified by Timothy's story of the need to separate the business partnership from his personal, leisure-time relationships, although in general Timothy considers William to be his friend. Limiting relationships to the business relationship serves to limit the damage to personal relationships if there should be problems in the business. If they spent a lot more time together both during office and leisure hours, the potential problems in the business would be transferred automatically to freetime activities and friendships, i.e. to Timothy's personal sphere of life.

6.6.6 Falsity of constructing a story: Business as usual

As with the other participants I ask Timothy about positive and negative experiences during his entrepreneurial career and being the business. Timothy refuses to reply to my question. He states that it would be 'false and hypocritical' to answer and that it would overemphasise one particular event over another resulting in a false picture. Timothy takes the issue of business threats as an example. There are threats but Timothy underlines that one should not dwell on them because the company and Timothy possess skills, knowledge and networks that can overcome any such threats. Even if the worst case scenario occurred and all the customers and employees disappeared Timothy would just say '*so what, tomorrow I will sell something else...*'. This demonstrates Timothy's strong belief in the business, his own skills and knowledge and the idea is derived from his construction that the business is secure from external catastrophes, such as losing all its business. Even in the worst case scenario – the com-

pany closure – all the employees including Timothy could easily find new jobs. Thus, the risk element is reduced because in Timothy's account there is not really any room for failure, it is absent in Timothy's story. Company closure is not given the meaning of facing enormous debts and the loss of jobs for Timothy and his employees. Timothy does not seem to share the same responsibility for the destinies of his employees as the other employer participants in this study (Rosemary, Jonathan and Arthur). In Timothy's story the employees would just go and get jobs elsewhere if he ceases to employ them. Similarly, the lack of such dramatic events on Timothy's horizon makes it difficult for him to talk about particular events.

Nevertheless, I do not give up my search for such a story but I ask again whether there have been any moments when it has or really has not made sense for him to be entrepreneur. Timothy continues his story of the lack of difficulties by saying that they have never been at the edge of bankruptcy, thus, explaining that the difficulties have never been that important and by underlining his unwillingness to talk about them. However, he softens his claim by saying he does not deny that sometimes the financial issues have caused some anxiety, for example, if he started to think about the consequences of such an occurrence on his personal economy or that of his employees it would make him feel very anxious. This is a paradoxical construction to the idea presented above. Regarding the difficulties Timothy has sometimes calculated whether the business is really worth the effort or whether it would make more sense to quit the business. With his education he could potentially earn more in salaries than as an entrepreneur. Thus, entrepreneurship is just one of the alternatives available for Timothy and other career alternatives might even be financially more lucrative. His explanation for staying in the business is the learning that has resulted from '*not selling just peanuts*'. In the business he has had the opportunity to get to know a lot of people in high positions and he enjoys the freedom. If he has a headache in the morning, he can sleep it off but sometimes one needs to work all weekends. Thus, for Timothy entrepreneurial freedom is connected to the responsibilities attached.

At this point Timothy returns to not wanting to give an account of the days of glory and despair in the job by reducing them into single, little events, which would not do justice to the holistic picture. It seems that Timothy wants me to understand entrepreneurship as a mosaic that consists of small tiles – in any one day there are both positive and negative events - and describing just one tile does not do justice to the overall mosaic. Then, Timothy compares his own experiences (the small tiles of the

mosaic) against the experience of the owners of the Iobox who sold their business and received a huge sum for it. This would be a significant, joyful moment that Timothy could see would really make a difference. Although renouncing from the ideal of getting rich this serves as another example of the way Timothy's story is interwoven with the story of getting rich. Timothy's reluctance to talk about single events is further explained by his theory that variation is part of the business and a normal activity. It is a value in itself to work as an entrepreneur because somebody somewhere else makes a decision that provides Timothy's company with an opportunity.

6.6.7 Family matters: Constructing a future against wealth

I ask Timothy how his family members have reacted towards his entrepreneurship. This issue Timothy deals with irony and humour by saying that his wife has sometimes asked him to 'go and get a job somewhere else', and as a Swedish speaking Finn his mother would have liked to have seen him work for a tobacco company with a history. He distances himself from the Swedish speaking search of tradition and long history by renouncing from the ideal by saying that he has never even applied for such a post. Yet he has never been unemployed even for a day. He portrays himself as a survivor who with his knowledge and experience can always get a job if worse comes to worse. The only worry he has is not the availability of jobs but the fear that he will lose the ability to work for another company if he works long enough for his own business. In this sense Timothy is sensitive to the potential socialisation process linked with entrepreneurship that will limit his future options. In a way this story echoes Eliza's (6.3, p. 160) metaphor of entrepreneurship as a journey where after a certain point return is no longer possible.

As with his refusal to talk about the events that have taken place in his career Timothy also refuses or claims not to think about the future that he again paradoxically identifies as a negative issue (similar to lacking the goal of getting rich). He constructs a hypothetical ideal of an entrepreneur who budgets to obtain a castle in France and starts working towards this goal. Again, Timothy uses getting rich as a mirror against which his story and the story of his company are reflected. Yet, the ideal is again refuted to be one of Timothy's personal goals, which he explains is a result of his son being serious ill as a baby, an event which led him to reassess his values. His son has recovered which makes life taste much better than before and enables Timothy to appreciate each day. Then another potential source for changing values is introduced in the story, ageing.

Timothy describes himself as a young business student who was more idealistic and selfish who's primary goal was sitting at the computer and devising ways 'to shovel money into the pockets'. Timothy's life and the way of living have changed and currently what is most important is what is happening here and now and he does not run like an idiot (leaving unsaid: after money and fame?) in order to have time at home to play with kids.

The meaning of entrepreneurship for Timothy is developing his business towards doing things better and producing better quality – and this makes the rituals of the work more meaningful. This aim and goal is, however, ridiculed by Timothy himself '*maybe we are stupid and it would make more sense to develop standardized products that could be produced by pressing a button*'. In Timothy's construction the norm in the field is making money. The norms of the field are transmitted in the talk of Timothy who as an entrepreneur in the field is surrounded by this talk and needs to construct his story against this norm.

6.6.8 Entrepreneurship as a virtue

Ulla: *Is anybody up to becoming an entrepreneur or are more people now able to than did before?*

Timothy takes a humorous tone in replying '*surely entrepreneurs are always needed*'. Then, in a more serious account he believes it to be beneficial for people to understand more about entrepreneurship. Although he believes that not everybody needs to become an entrepreneur paralleling it to the army '*like all people need not to go to the army*' everyone would benefit from knowing what it is all about by having the experience. The meaning of such experience and knowledge would influence people's attitudes towards their own jobs, own finances and the economy in general. It would really make them understand where the bread comes from as opposed to getting things for free and being paid for appearing at the work eight hours a day, five days a week. Timothy also extends the understanding of entrepreneurship to cover intrapreneurial aspects by making a reference to me '*how would it be possible to get the same thing out of you researchers as from entrepreneurs*'. In this sense entrepreneurs are the hard-working value creators and entrepreneurship is a virtue in Timothy's story.

Timothy does not share an understanding that entrepreneurship can be forcefully fed to people but believes that some act in this way, some do not, and he undermines the value of inviting people to start their own

business courses. In this way entrepreneurship is at least partially constructed to be the inner characteristic of people. The need for more entrepreneurs is introduced to represent more support services that are needed as Timothy interprets that becoming an entrepreneur requires knowledge and skills. The smaller the company the less skills it has. In Timothy's view, entrepreneurship could also be a useful hobby for many. He explains that it is an awful risk to become an entrepreneur, especially if both the husband and wife become entrepreneurs. Although in his own account the risks are downplayed they are, however, seen to be a reality for others interested in an entrepreneurial career.

We then start talking about entrepreneurship studies in the Business School. Timothy's idea is to instil more glamour in the studies because business students are just interested in working for Nokia or Accenture. They just want to lead a flashy life, which includes flying from one country to another which is then compared against the option of becoming an entrepreneur: doing everything yourself and then losing all your money. Timothy, however, suggests that a business school could have a role in teaching opportunities for entrepreneurship, especially how enterprises are successfully set up and grown as opposed to the great majority of firms which do not have any growth prospects. The idea Timothy proposes is that business school can foster certain kinds of entrepreneurship, meaning growth oriented entrepreneurs as opposed to the 'half-bred' ones, the many small business owners' that concentrate merely on survival. In Timothy's view the students in the business school are interested in fast-wins and fast cars (the norm in IT business?), which he ironically states is '*a thing always worth searching for*'. In this case irony is used to demonstrate Timothy's ideology and the norm in the business and the values of business students. Timothy continues to draw the image of an average business school student as being overoptimistic and unrealistic in career objectives basing their decisions more on appearances ('neat and fancy') rather than on the reality. Therefore, courses in entrepreneurship should be labelled and promoted as 'how to get rich fast' courses to attract students who could then be given some education in the field of being involved in start-ups. It seems that Timothy identifies at least partially with this image of business students but has subsequently abandoned it as knowing better.

6.6.9 Networking and bureaucracy

Timothy does not belong to any enterprise association because he is not interested in those kinds of activities. He explains that his company has

never sold anything to an association or public sector company, they have only done business with private companies. He does not therefore identify the need to be actively involved with enterprise associations or the public sector. In addition, in Timothy's view networking does not take place by socializing and drinking coffee together which he describes is the role of enterprise associations and agencies in general, but networking takes place if companies decide to subcontract from each other.

Similarly to the other stories (for example Jonathan and Eliza) Timothy believes that it is relatively easy to be an entrepreneur in Finland by reducing the requirements to only one crucial requirement: to ensure more cash comes into the business than leaves from it. Similarly, the bureaucracy can be a nuisance if one is busy with other issues but with the right education it is not difficult. Timothy suggests that bureaucracy is not difficult for him because he has the education but it can be for entrepreneurs who are uneducated and ignorant.

6.6.10 Discussion on Timothy's entrepreneurial identity

Timothy is keen on presenting an honest and truthful account of his entrepreneurship, which can be seen in the many occasions where he questions the usability of the information he provides me. He repeatedly asks me to try to come up with more and better questions that would probe the issues that really interest me and by making several parallels between his work and mine to bridge between our experiences and to foster communication.

Timothy presents the business activities to be business as usual, and he questions the meaning of both negative and positive individual events in his business or his entrepreneurship and the ability of the minor events to reflect and transfer the truthful picture of being an entrepreneur. His description of entrepreneurship resembles that of a mosaic that can only be judged as a whole and where the individual tiles are not important. However, the frustration for Timothy in the interview comes from not finding a way to make me see the mosaic through his verbal account.

Timothy's story and his entrepreneurial identity are narrated against the norms in the IT industry. The decision to become an entrepreneur is presented as an uncomplicated one. Timothy graduated in the middle of a recession and did not have many career alternatives, therefore, by going into entrepreneurship he did not have much to lose. Although he renounces the goal of getting rich it is however applied as a resource throughout the account to construct his story. The goal that Timothy pursues as worthwhile is building and delivering a good quality service to

his customers which is compared with the business norm of trying to sell standardised products to generate profits (and ultimately get rich). Timothy identifies the change of personal values that has taken place since his university years and which was intensified by the illness of his son.

Although narrated from the entrepreneur position Timothy often labels himself as the CEO of his company reflecting his business graduate background. In this role he also identifies himself as the coaching manager of his employees underlining the necessity to parent and educate the X generation employees who are not always realistic and aware of the demands of working life.

6.7 Arthur's Story

Arthur is a 54-year-old MSc (engineering) graduate who has been an entrepreneur since 1985. The company specialises in engineering and consulting especially in one particular technical niche area. Arthur works in general management and in consulting and training of TQM, other quality issues, business development and strategic planning. The fact that the company's general area of business and that of Arthur's are not identical could be described as a form of entrepreneurial learning boosted by a critical incident, the bankruptcy of his former company.

6.7.1 Presenting the scene

I have seen Arthur a few times before I call him to set up the interview but I get the feeling that he does not remember me, which does not surprise me since we have met only in larger groups, and not spoken to one another directly. The most important reason for contacting Arthur is that I know that he has gone through a bankruptcy and he is also able to speak about it. When calling him I tell him that I have heard his talk about his entrepreneurial story and I would like to interview him for my study. Arthur is a bit wary about my request and asks for further details about my study and its' aims. I interpret this as his wanting to know whether my study deals with 'bankruptcy cases' so I explain that I am after different kinds of entrepreneurial stories from an identity development perspective, that I have a sociological approach but I am from the Business School. Arthur agrees to participate 'as he has a policy of trying to help researchers' and we arrange to meet at his office.

On the day of the meeting I drive to the company, get lost and I have to call the secretary for instructions, she also comes downstairs to open

the door for me. I knock on the door of Arthur's room where he is sitting at his computer writing something. He finishes what he is doing and then offers me some coffee before we start. Arthur's account is a reflexive and analytic one and he is very articulate, which convinces me of his capability as a consultant and a trainer. It seems to me that he has been thinking about the events and his entrepreneurial career a lot. Maybe for this reason the story is being told to an anonymous listener and I am not so much present at the interview. My interventions are few and Arthur does not need or expect them to tell his story, nor does he address me directly except a few times during the interview. The situation is amicable but a bit reserved despite the fact that Arthur tells his story seemingly openly spicing it with his dry humour, which makes me smile and laugh during the interview. Maybe the distance and reservedness are necessary for telling of the difficult times or our generational gap appoints me into the novice researcher position where the equal discussion is not of interest. Towards the end of the interview I ask about the future and this story Arthur starts by referring to the near future and his going to a concert in about half an hour thus providing the limits for our meeting.

6.7.2 Setting up the company

I start the interview by asking Arthur how he became an entrepreneur. In Arthur's reply the story of becoming an entrepreneur is paralleled to the story of becoming an engineer where both are presented as chances, not results of intentional behaviour. In this sense Arthur's meaning of 'chance' is something not planned for, not aimed at. This category of chance is present in many studies researching the motivations and reasons behind entrepreneurship but it tells us very little if the meaning of the category is not elaborated. The result 'being an engineer and an entrepreneur' is, however, something that Arthur has pondered upon, which is made obvious by the reflective analysis and summary to follow.

Arthur starts his narration from the concrete situation at the time: he works as a CEO of an engineering company where the owner manager shares a totally different value system and thinks along very different lines to Arthur. Finally, Arthur has had enough and decides to leave the company and to go into teaching. At this point some colleagues at the enterprise agree with him about leaving the enterprise but suggest that they should leave together and set up their own enterprise, which they do in 1985. The support of the others is presented as important, and the force that pushes him to a route that he had not thought of previously, that of becoming an entrepreneur. This seemingly accidental route is made sense

of by his long experience as a CEO of the company. The category of chance is thus present in Arthur's story but the meaning is not related to the colloquial usage of 'being stumbled upon' or 'then something just happened'. Arthur himself summarises the list of the events that lead to his becoming an entrepreneur as; '*a conflict that finds its culmination point combined with collegial relations at the time*'. He believes it is possible to attribute the story of his entrepreneurship to his misfit, maladjusted character, whereby he is not able to be humble and to behave in a particular way, and therefore has difficulty working in hierarchical organisations. This is presented as one of the important reasons for the entrepreneurship. Hence, in Arthur's story although not being his ultimate goal, it was in his character to become an entrepreneur (see also Timothy's story 6.6, p. 217). This suggests that the idea put forward in entrepreneurship studies that a person must be of a certain kind of character to be an entrepreneur has pervaded our culture. Being an entrepreneur is therefore framed as an opportunity to be himself, be difficult and proud, not humble, although another kind of humility is introduced later in the story. Another reason and also a source of joy for Arthur in being an entrepreneur is what he calls 'the illusionary freedom'. Freedom is also on the list of themes that re-occur in both studies of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs' stories. The descriptive addition 'illusionary' is, however, important for Arthur. He acknowledges that he is bound by his customers more tightly than perhaps ever but he still feels that he is making the decisions.

6.7.3 Accidental engineer

Since the stories of becoming an entrepreneur and an engineer are parallel in Arthur's story where he describes himself as the 'accidental engineer' I ask Arthur to elaborate on the notion of becoming an engineer by chance: '*What is the story behind this comment?*' '*The story is...*' Arthur replies and he uses the word story ('tarina') when accepting my invitation to tell this particular tale. He engages in a long narration of the long, winding journey from being a person with an ambition to become a metal shop worker who gradually acquires schooling, gains new degrees and becomes an engineer with a university degree. So, the concept of an accidental engineer refers to long route he took with his studies.

He was born in an industrial area where hard work was appreciated rather than studying and becoming a metal shop worker was his dream. The stories of class and social category are parallel in the stories of Arthur and Jonathan. The environment for the two has been more or less the

same (although 10 years apart) but their interpretation of the situation and the related choices have been quite different. Arthur (born in 1945) studied first in a vocational school to become a metal shop worker.

*I have, I have **cough** well aimed, aimed to be an honourable metal, metal worker since I was a child. Because to be a turner or a mechanic was the finest ambition I knew and I did not know of any finer job. I went to the vocational school after completing the elementary school of the time and I refused to go to the grammar school based on the fact that it was not the custom in the circles we were in. It was those 'sissy boys' that went to the grammar school but those of us who knew what they wanted, they went to the vocational school.*

In the above quote the idea of having a limited view and vision of his options is made obvious as being a metal shop worker was the 'finest he could think of' and it also shows that from that position the availability of career alternatives is limited. By going to high school he would have needed to adopt the 'chicken' position, which was not an attractive one for a teenage boy. Then, however, the romantic ideals are confronted with the harsh reality: through gaining actual experience of the metal shop it becomes less and less attractive and suitable and Arthur starts to see other options. Gradually he studies to be a technician, an engineer and finally a university engineer working in between or sometimes during his studies. He describes this process as the gradually opening of opportunities that he sees and grasps. Working for some years in Sweden Arthur faces the consequences of his schooling as he learns in practice what it means to not have gone through the secondary grammar school - he had to learn language skills the hard way. Later back in Finland, however, it is these language skills that become valued as he is invited to join the board of an ADP group in a company because the training was organised by a Swedish company. This is an example of how the long period of schooling is interpreted both as a disadvantage and an advantage by Arthur throughout the story. Although he abandoned the metal shop it is however a part of Arthur's identity as illustrated when Arthur tells a short story of discussions between his daughter and himself:

Daughter: *I pity those that need to go into a vocational school.*
 Arthur: *Your father was also one of those.*
 Daughter: *Yes, but...*
 Arthur: *And but what?*

This short conversation-like story is presented as an example of how Arthur still respects this kind of vocation and life. Although he has climbed the social ladder, he has not forgotten his roots nor is he ashamed of them. The early career choice that later was reversed by the schooling and related career choices is the result of his social surroundings when he was young.

After returning to Finland Arthur goes to study in the technical school now taking a special course aimed at technicians to develop them into engineers. *'It was one of those wild experiments of the Ministry of Education at the time'*. The fact that it took only three years instead of four is given as a reason that motivated him. After graduating as an engineer he thought *'that something needs still to be done'* and through voluntary, organizational activities he had acquired some contacts at the University of Technology. At the time he was still planning to become a journalist because he did not feel like an engineer, however, his options were limited due to his background and experience were primarily technical. An opportunity arose to study at the same time as working. The close proximity of the university also contributed to his decision to start studying, which in Arthur's words *'sounds ridiculous but those things matter at the time'* stressing that it is minor events and issues that also play a big role in our decision-making (see also the story of Jonathan 6.2, p. 139 and the role of tax deductions). So, Arthur graduates as a university engineer. In telling this story the extended studies are interpreted as an exception, a rarity, which emphasise the unorthodox route he has taken. The accident nature of his becoming an engineer is further emphasised by his interest towards other careers such as journalism and teaching. In Arthur's story the striving for new degrees and new goals is not portrayed as a goal-oriented activity, but as a gradual process where phase after phase a new but narrow window of opportunity emerges and he takes advantage of these opportunities. Arthur believes that he did not see the big picture in the beginning or during the process – when training to become a technician, he never planned on becoming an engineer or going to the university but each step was necessary for the emergence of the next step. This reinforces the definition of an 'accident or chance' introduced by Arthur previously. Arthur describes his studies as being the longest possible university education and the opposite of the fast track, which he is especially aware of now that his daughter has just graduated from university. He says he has no regrets about the route he took: *I may be poorer but I'm richer in experiences*. Since he is involved in consulting where the aim is to assure people and to persuade them to trust his professionalism, his background is an advantage. On the other hand, everything has taken a

lot of time as things have progressed slowly and his language skills are not at the level he would hope for framing the long track of studies as a negative issue. Arthur ends his story of education by stating laconically: *‘Accidental corporal and accidental engineer’*. These are said as some sort of humorous punch lines of a joke but they seem to hold more than that. It is as if his concepts of self have been developed through these stories. These crystallised slogans serve as illustrations of his identity, to represent the story that Arthur wants to convey of his path of studies and his nature. He did not thrive towards end-goals (degrees or statuses) but rather towards doing something interesting everyday and grasping the opportunities that emerged.

6.7.4 Flying start for the company

After the start-up the business activities began in haste. In the first year the budget doubled which Arthur explains as the result of the good times in the middle of an economic boom and by the good staff the enterprise employ. The story of the budget is presented as an atypical endeavour for entrepreneurs. When meeting with the bank manager and presenting the budget to him, the bank manager interprets it as an act of ‘civil servants’. This goes to demonstrate the planning orientation of Arthur but it is also taken as an example of the illusion the budget creates and it serves as a trace of the future of the company to be told later:

*There are the first twelve months in it [a calculation], specifications for earnings and expenses. It created an illusion that business is easy and what you plan comes true. And this is what happened to us. **laughter** Only the speed of development was faster than planned for.*

This quote is revealing in its construction as long before a single word is spoken about the bankruptcy the construction of this event has begun in the interview. The time before the bankruptcy is portrayed as an illusion to focus attention on the times to come – the series of difficulties that lead to the bankruptcy and a different approach towards business activities that the entrepreneur will take. The calculation was hand-written on a piece of paper and Arthur tries to find it during the interview to show me. The calculation creates an illusion that business is easy, everything that is planned will be realised. This construction is contradictory as it already suggests the ending of ‘something unplanned taking place’ pointing towards the culmination point in the story. Yet, the illusion was true for them for a while when the business was running smoothly and

only the speed of development was faster than planned providing new reasons to continue to live under the illusion. At the time of the start-up the company employed 11 employees and four years later about 30 people. At the end of the 1980s they opened another office in Bedrock¹⁹ so the operations were expanded which underlines the successful beginning. The operating margin for the company was at about 10% and this Arthur presents as a decent figure for an engineering company at the time. It was more than the industry average so they were pleased with it. However, a sharp distinction is made against today's expectations where this margin would be totally unacceptable. The acceptance at the time is explained on the basis of inexperience and the industry standards so responsibility lies outside the partners. In a way it would be difficult for a start-up company with inexperienced entrepreneurs to resist the common rules in the industry, it is only with personal experience that one starts to develop one's own rules.

6.7.5 The Big Ban(g)krruptcy

Aldrich and Martinez (2001, 41) claim that within entrepreneurship research the need remains for more understanding of how and why some entrepreneurs succeed. However, taking the narrative approach provides us with the interest in time, and we may wonder when it is appropriate to deem an entrepreneur successful. If the entrepreneur is still an entrepreneur, the story or the narrative is not yet closed and we do not know what the final outcome of the venture will be. Arthur is one of the many entrepreneurs that went bankrupt in the early 1990s in Finland (see also Lampela-Kivistö 2000, Lampela-Kivistö et al 2001) and he survived it and now runs a successful company. Looking at Arthur's story embedded in the context of bankruptcy stories Arthur could be labelled as one of the lucky, successful survivors of the recession.

Before starting to talk about the bankruptcy Arthur takes a pause. As with his overall story the bankruptcy is also a divider in the interview. I already know what lies ahead because I have heard this story before. On that previous occasion Arthur said that he is now able to tell the story, which was one of the reasons I contacted him. I did not want to pressure people into places they did not want to be or were not really able to revisit. Lampela-Kivistö (2001) took the difficult route but she could rely on her background and education as a former entrepreneur and a priest to manage the situation.

¹⁹ The name of the industrial Finnish town is fictional.

The climax and the culmination point of the story, which has been foreshadowed when talking about the early days of the company, is told in detail. It is the rich, thick story in Arthur's account. The biggest customer of the firm goes bankrupt at the dawn of the Finnish recession. Arthur's enterprise, Violet Ltd²⁰, is hit hard by the bankruptcy and the company has to prepare for the loss of a significant sum of money. The loss is underlined in Arthur's story to emphasise its' future effects on the company, to account for the underlying reasons for going bankrupt at a later phase and to pinpoint the miracle of them being still here. Arthur's company had built a special, close relationship with the customer, which is applied to explain the 'surprise' of the bankruptcy and not having been worried that the customer owed them such a big sum. The surprise is also explained by the previous theory of the firm 'that they will always make it', so the company did not pay enough attention to detail.

However, after a short break the activities of the customer continue with a newly established enterprise so Violet Ltd still has a faint chance of surviving the severe hit. However, more dark clouds emerge on the horizon. The enterprise had also decided to build new premises and they move into the new building worth nearly 700.000 Euros shortly after receiving the bankruptcy news. This decision Arthur presents as a peculiar fixation that is beyond explanation: '*Why on earth did it seem like a good idea for an engineering company' to acquire some property?* The astonishment is applied to distance himself from the decision as the whole issue/decision/idea is constructed as temporary insanity, an action that one is not able to account for. Yet, the explanation is available in Arthur's story. The prices of property were going up at the time and it was quite a common act for enterprises to try to speculate on properties. When the decision was made it seemed like a lucrative investment for the future. In retrospect, however, it was unfortunate that the bankruptcy of the customer and the acquisition of the new premises took place at the same time. Unfortunately for Violet Ltd the worries did not end but an internal conflict took place. The two partners in the Bedrock office were worried about the customer's bankruptcy, of the related losses and their effects on the future dividends and decided to start a new company by trying to recruit the old company's employees. This Arthur interprets as a criminal activity against Violet Ltd. In analysing this particular story I am a bit bewildered because I do not understand how this event is different from the early days when Arthur left his former company and the others joined

²⁰ The name of the enterprise is fictional. The company is presented in Arthur's story because he uses 'we' to talk about the activities, thus making it difficult to identify who the 'we' is unless understanding it as a collective; the enterprise and the partners including Arthur.

him in the new established enterprise? Was it a question of openness or another difference that distinguishes the two actions? Nevertheless, there is a quarrel, which results in Arthur immediately firing the two partners who challenge the dismissal, and the municipal court decides in favour of the partners with the result that Violet Ltd needs to pay compensation to the partners. At the time the situation in the Bedrock office was economically sound as the firm was chosen as a major subcontractor in the renovation of a factory, so it could have been a lifesaver for the entire enterprise. Violet Ltd makes an appeal to the Court of Appeal with disappointing results as the original decision is upheld but the company is granted permission to appeal to the Supreme Court. At this point, however, they must start paying the compensation. At the same time a deep recession hits the country hard and the work in Bedrock is cancelled. The recession causes a substantial drop in design prices and the opportunities for work become limited. Finally there is no direction to go so suddenly the company's outlook which had been good with the diversified clientele, had weakened considerably and the company is required to pay compensation to the fired partners. Although a few years later the Supreme Court makes a decision in favour of Violet Ltd the decision comes too late and the remaining partners in the enterprise need to consider the options based on the available knowledge and information at the time. The resolution is that the partners would need to invest a considerable sum in Violet Ltd and still be forced to lay off people and conduct other cruelties that they were not prepared to do. This is illustrative of the early days of the enterprise that had prepared everybody for merry days, growth and good future prospects, and not for dealing with difficult clearance issues. This is also an example of Arthur's need to rely on calculation, weighing decisions and planning rather than on intuition, which can be compared to the budgeting example of the early days of the company that is portrayed as a key element in Arthur's entrepreneurial story.

The culmination point for business activities comes when Arthur and his partners file the petition for a bankruptcy. However, to better understand the event – the bankruptcy – and its' meaning to Arthur at the time and now, it needs to be analysed through the different related events rather than one singular event. The bankruptcy declaration in itself was not the biggest difficulty for Arthur, it is construed more as a relief as it represents a closure of the difficult times preceding it. The downward cascade of the previous events creates an experience of losing control, which is formulated into a short, fictional but illustrative narrative by Arthur.

Imagine you are in a car that dashes down a meandering road and occasionally the car veers off the road and you just have to stay in it, wondering what will happen.

The short story is Arthur's attempt to create a mutual understanding and even a mutual feeling of the event in the interview session. He invites me to take part in the experience by referring to me 'imagine you are...' and then takes me to an experience that is easy to understand and to feel (in one's stomach even). It is the feeling of losing control, being totally powerless in the face of the social changes, that was also found to be a major element causing mental encumbrances in a large study investigating the recession and its effects on individuals in Finland. (Lampela-Kivistö 2000, 164-190, Lampela-Kivistö et al 2001, 477-478) In Arthur's story control is regained through the culmination point – the petition for bankruptcy – after which the business activities continue as an agreement is reached with the bank. Besides being a success story in many respects, Arthur's story could also be seen as a survival story since he continues business activities and regains control and self-confidence (See also Lampela-Kivistö 2000, 228-229). Understanding the risks involved is found in Arthur's story as he finds the situation emotionally very distressing and he can easily imagine someone getting physically ill because of it (Lampela-Kivistö et al 2001, 475-476).

Although in the story the events are narrated one after the other – bankruptcy of the customer, acquisition of new property, betrayal of the partners, recession – adding to our understanding of the immensity of the problems Arthur and the enterprise had to live through, the meaning of the bankruptcy for the current activities is, however, constructed as a half-positive one. It is given the meaning of a 'tough teacher' who forced him to learn a lesson that he needed to learn to become a serious, professional entrepreneur. In Arthur's story the key element is the construction of the fast learning curve to meet the demands of the tough teacher, the bankruptcy. The bankruptcy is portrayed as a powerful and important culmination point in Arthur's narrative but as opposed to describing the bankruptcy as a 'bad experience' it is given the meaning of a needed 'reminder'. (See also Mitchell 1997, 134 of accommodating failure as a learning experience and adding these lessons to the venturing rule book of entrepreneurs.)

A bankruptcy is, I believe an efficient teacher if you survive it. It is a really efficient teacher. [] It was one of those moments, when things were out of control, when one needed to learn about things really quickly, that it is unacceptable to be unaware of things.

Then I really focused on management issues, and ended up in quality training. I took a year off as a sabbatical and then took a long quality course, which provided a lot of resources to continue further. Then I started doing consultancy and training work.

Interestingly Arthur specifically relates the feeling of losing control to an earlier event in his life:

And then, then I was really startled, a little bit like I was startled at some point at school when I realised that I had not been following things in class.

Clearly, from an outside point-of-view, these two events seem rather unbalanced: the other deals with losing control of a business with the potential dramatic influences on the entrepreneur, the firm and its employees, and the other a small scale event of being absent-minded in class many years before. However, the stories are linked together emotionally – it is the feeling of losing control and being startled. The events are also linked metaphorically – the bankruptcy is portrayed as a ‘teacher’ and the classroom setting paralleled in the other story supports this construction. In Rae’s article (2002, 57) it is also suggested that acting entrepreneurially deals with balancing emotional with rational expression. For Arthur, studying management, quality and control issues of small businesses becomes important in the sense that the area develops into a new business area for him and the company. In this sense, the ‘teacher’ taught him not only to manage his business but also to help other entrepreneurs to manage their businesses.

The time before the bankruptcy is portrayed as a carefree time where the confident entrepreneur is not really aware of the real facts of life and how a person is supposed to run a business. The bankruptcy serves as a divider: after the bankruptcy a new set of rules that include precision, control and clear focus in the business are imposed. The way the bankruptcy dominates Arthur’s story and especially the structuring of the story before the bankruptcy can be analysed from the point of view that both the present and past are a function of the whole that also includes the future but when something actually happens that surprises us (the bankruptcy), then in an important sense the past is changed (Carr 1986, 29). A new view of life and of one’s future requires a break with and re-interpretation of one’s past. This is what Carr (1986, 71) calls the autobiographical revision.

In comparison to other stories of the ‘incompetent self of the past’ that are applied to make sense of the mistakes made, it seems less easy for

Arthur to talk about his own ‘foolishness’ as the story of himself is constructed in a passive tone – Arthur uses the construction ‘one is not aware’ rather than actively saying ‘I was not aware’. However, Arthur in his own words belittled the meaning and value of knowledge, especially knowledge in the field of business management and control. Arthur sees being over-confident as the major reason for the bankruptcy of the company. He assumes responsibility for the incident although it would be easy to blame the difficult economic situation. As the early development of the company was so promising, there was no need to establish effective control systems within the company. Although the business activities of the company continued after the bankruptcy Arthur took the need for increased learning very seriously by taking a sabbatical year to concentrate on educating himself and acquiring new competencies.

After the interview when I have already turned off the tape-recorder and I am ready to leave Arthur remarks that interestingly the events do not seem to be so important or catastrophic as they once were. Thus, the time and the narrative have been influential in transforming a once catastrophic event to a ‘mere’ reminder that the entrepreneur needed to take things seriously in order to learn the essentials of business. This echoes the study by Stokes – Blackburn (2002) where it is suggested that the closure of a business can be understood as ‘learning the hard way’ and not as a failure that stigmatises the entrepreneur.

6.7.6 Continuing business activities, a new rule book for the business but the stigma remains

After the bankruptcy Arthur takes a sabbatical, which he devotes to quality training and getting involved with management issues and he starts doing consultancy and training. This new line of business is explained by his previous work experience of being a teacher and having some training in the field, which serves to show that he does not start from ‘scratch’. The need to create new life ventures is given meaning by linking it with and basing it on former experience. This is built into the narrative as becoming a consultant and is given sense by the combination of the new acquired learning and his former experience as a teacher. A further reason is also presented in the form of the closing of the doors elsewhere; he is unable to pursue activities linked with his former business as his name was stigmatised by the bankruptcy dealings. Hence, his personal future within a particular business activity was closed and his personal name could be seen stamped with a particular label. (Sutton – Callahan 1987, 421-422, Lampela-Kivistö 2000)

Ucbazaran et al (2001, 62) write that entrepreneurial learning is about connecting and making inferences from various pieces of information that have not previously been connected. Personal history and experience are seen important in this respect. For Arthur the bankruptcy meant he had to learn about business management and this again led him to a new type of business activity – training and consulting. Following ideas presented by Shane and Venkatamaran (2000) entrepreneurship could be termed as exploring and exploiting opportunities. This is hardly a linear process but can be seen to slow down during periods of confidence and relative success as presented above, and then again speeded up during periods of crisis. The crisis situation – the bankruptcy – led Arthur, firstly, to analyse the reason he saw behind the crisis (management), and it led also to a new opportunity.

Bankruptcy as a tough teacher imposes a new rule for doing business that could be termed as ‘being careful and humble’ as opposed to the old rule of ‘carefree and arrogant’. New rules are also imposed on the enterprise – the activities and their profitability are scrutinised and the enterprise concentrates on its core competence areas. It is this lesson that Arthur has learned the hard way that he also tries pass on to new entrepreneurs in his consulting activities. The new operational model is also necessary to build confidence in the new business activities ‘*as the old model led to nothing but bankruptcy*’. Thus, there is a sharp distinction between the new and the old working model, which is also made visible in the company size; the company has a highly experienced, but small team (10 employees as opposed to 30 before) that concentrates on servicing the niche market. The current company size makes the business much more manageable and easy to plan and control. In addition, the net profits of the company are at a higher level than in the old days. This emphasises the new rule of being in control and making sure that the company is profitable enough to survive eventual downturns.

Arthur gains access to various consulting and other types of work and gets good feedback from his work. This again is framed as ‘pure coincidence’ in the story: ‘*if I had failed in the project, nobody would have asked me to do anything more*’. The responsibility, in this construction, is awarded to others and not claimed by Arthur in the form of doing a good job and receiving well-earned appraisal for it. It could be that the surprise of the bankruptcy and his incapability of controlling the event are being transferred to future successes and he is not able to assume full responsibility for them as he had learned the hard way that in business life things can go either way.

Immediately after the bankruptcy the relationship with the bank remained good – both sides agreed that mistakes were made on both sides. Due to the buoyancy of the financial markets and the related mergers new people were appointed to the bank to manage their account and the relationship with the bank did not remain stable. Violet Ltd was assigned a new identity, they were labelled as ‘half-criminal’, the category of companies coming out of a bankruptcy. Arthur thinks this is unfair, as they had not engaged in any unlawful activities. The remaining partners filed for bankruptcy because they believed the price of continuing was too high but others in the same situation might have continued business activities. This would suggest that both success and failure are not absolute, but are relative phenomena that are interconnected with psychological factors. In their estimation a decision had to be made in order to find a resolution that prevented the psychological or financial burden becoming too high. The bank’s reaction was an unpleasant experience for Arthur and parallels the other stigmatic experience of the ‘closing doors’ recounted previously. Financially Violet Ltd had to operate on income financing until a bank manager from another bank took over the loan as a result of building personal contacts. This is a triumph in Arthur story that serves to demonstrate the credibility of the company when even complete outsiders can see that the company was performing in a decent, lawful way. So Violet Ltd is let off the hook to lead a normal life. The two uncomfortable experiences (the prevention of personal involvement in business activities for Arthur and the bank’s refusal to finance the enterprise) reflect, firstly, the stigma that is attached to bankruptcies in Finland and, secondly, that the nature of business-to-business relationships is, at least partially, highly personal. Trust is gained and lost on a personal level rather than on business-to-business level and one’s own identity and self-esteem are under scrutiny emphasising the point that entrepreneurs bear not only financial risks but their personalities are also threatened by business failures.

From the current position where Arthur has a good working relationship with the new bank, he can make fun of the old main bank and its’ curiosity of why Violet Ltd now has so few needs from the bank, with the wry comment ‘*a friend in need is a friend indeed*’. This leads Arthur to talk more about bankers as an anonymous, stereotypical group who are known for being too cautious, playing by the rules and overreacting as opposed to thinking with their own brains. This is contrasted with the entrepreneurial way of focusing on future repayment capabilities as opposed to the existing nominal value of collateral. The distinction helps to portray entrepreneurs as a social group largely different from bank man-

agers. Arthur applies sarcasm in suggesting that *'If banks had to accept the serious repayment plans the picture would be totally different but that calls for thinking and familiarization'*. This again serves illustrate the contradiction in the banks' actions from the entrepreneurial point-of-view: they are turning their backs when things get difficult and being overly eager to provide financing when the company is doing well. This could be interpreted as the clashing of the two cultures, the corporate and the entrepreneurial (See also Gibb – Cotton 1998, 7).

Although the decision to concentrate on consulting was partially influenced by the lack of other options, it is interpreted mainly as a positive issue as the value assigned to Arthur in consulting is much higher than in the engineering. Yet, the stigma he has been stabled with for over ten years is a source of irritation although he also ridicules it in his story demonstrating that it has not done any serious harm. The story of the stigma closes the bankruptcy story but there are traces of it later when current activities are being reflected upon in the context of the past.

6.7.7 Enjoying life as an entrepreneur: recognition, nature of work and profits

At this point of Arthur's story he makes a reference to my letter *'here are some of the culmination points; then you had questions about the rewarding moments...'* and engages in a narrative where the rewarding moments are listed more as general claims than the previous thick, detailed stories of the problems and difficulties. This suggests that the difficulties and problems make better stories than rewarding moments. Although a distinction is made between the early days of the company by ridiculing the company rules at the time it is also presented as a rewarding phase by comparing it to a big party where everything goes as planned under the warm, brilliant sun. This is then contrasted against the outcome as the 'party' made the company too weak to face failure. The 'everything going as planned' is therefore presented as not the best strategy if a company wants to survive and prosper in the long term. This suggests that a sufficient amount of difficulties is both ideal and necessary for a start-up company (see also Eliza's story 6.3, p. 160 for the need to have downturns in the business in order to remain humble).

Good feedback is also rewarding for Arthur as he lists the various projects where he has gained acceptance into a difficult market *'all the others have had to come back, tails between their legs but I go there again and again'*. Consulting work in general is considered rewarding as one sees the results of one's work. It feels good when the plans developed by

Arthur have been applied in practice. Therefore, being involved in something practical and worthwhile is meaningful for Arthur. The projects that have received international or national recognition are also presented as examples of rewarding moments suggesting that recognition is important for Arthur. He, however, notes that the successes flag with time although they were important events at the time. It is a similar idea that Arthur provides at the end of the interview in relation to the bankruptcy; time diminishes everything, both successes and failures. Although the importance of doing a good job seems to play a major role in his entrepreneurship the financial rewards are also given a place because they are meaningful both personally and for the continuity of the business.

Inspired by his list of rewarding moments Arthur then makes a shift in his talk to claim that in the general discussion of entrepreneurship too much emphasis is on negative things and images. Arthur takes himself as an example to demonstrate that although he has faced a lot of negative experiences he has not become a grim person. This is explained by the search for space elsewhere if a particular door has been closed. The bankruptcy story is revisited as Arthur frames it as a 'reminder' that he needed in order to improve his activities but he mitigates this notion with the comment '*I did not need as hard a reminder as a bankruptcy*' to soften the claim. The point is, however, that Arthur believes that every entrepreneur needs a push in order to reach their full potential, otherwise they might become entrenched in routines and the old operational model and become mentally slack. The idea of a sufficient amount of difficulties is therefore repeated.

Then Arthur shifts back to the list of positive things about being an entrepreneur, and returns to the illusion of being one's own boss and being free that is referred to at the beginning of the story. Our interview is taken as an example of Arthur being free to agree or disagree to participate in it. Interestingly planning and controlling one's own business is also listed as a reward of the current business, which could be the result of his feelings of losing control during the bankruptcy, emphasising the necessity for individuals to be in control of their lives.

In my letter I had a question about the important people for entrepreneurship and I take it up in the interview. Similar to the rewarding moments the people are also just listed in contrast to the long stories told about the difficulties. Arthur's former employer is presented as an example of both the good and the bad. The least acceptable facet of his character was his immoral way of handling truth, which Arthur could not relate to. Therefore, Arthur's decision to become an entrepreneur was also partially influenced by his dissatisfaction in his previous job, which seems to

play part in most of the stories of entrepreneurs. As a result of his long educational career Arthur has met a lot of teachers but only a few specialists have been influential in Arthur's entrepreneurship. It is the long period of studies that creates a need to comment on the role of teachers although they are not considered important in his becoming an entrepreneur. This is contrasted against the people at the business agency who surprisingly for Arthur have been meaningful. Although they are civil servants they have understood some basics about business, and have been objective and professional, which is reflected against the usual image assigned to civil servants as inept paper shufflers. Nevertheless, it is the surprise element that is emphasised in order to illustrate the distinction between civil servants and entrepreneurs. The need to portray entrepreneurs as a social group different from both civil servants and bank managers is a theme, which permeates Arthur's story.

Due to his involvement on some advisory boards of research, project researchers are also given a place in the list of influential people. Previously, Arthur did not really appreciate them because of their ignorance of manufacturing processes but later Arthur has realised that researchers are capable of learning and becoming experts if they possess adequate methodological skills. This is listed as the benefit of researchers that they do not need to know anything in the beginning but will learn with time if they possess the right methods to find things out. It is on this occasion that Arthur makes one of the few direct references to me in the interview '*you'll walk as wise person for the rest of your life if you're methodologically up to date*'. This construction could also be understood as a distinction between entrepreneurs and researchers suggesting that entrepreneurs need to know at the beginning what they are doing or at least be capable of 'acting as if' they knew and could deal with all the issues necessary for their entrepreneurship (See also Gartner 1992, Rae 2002).

Some successful entrepreneurial personalities are also listed as being influential once Arthur discovered they were good businessmen worth appreciating. This is further emphasised by making a comparison with 'familiar from TV' business celebrities that Arthur finds hard to evaluate as he likes to define and make his mind himself and he finds it difficult to accept authorities. The category of a charismatic, influential and honest person is compared with the posh show offs who do not convince Arthur as he himself has learned that one needs to be humble as an entrepreneur because being in business is not easy. The idea of entrepreneurship being difficult leads Arthur to talk about the reluctance of business graduates to go into entrepreneurship: '*In this sense it maybe the right conclusion that so few business students want to become entrepreneurs. Studying reveals*

the risks and the need for versatile skills so that it [entrepreneurship] becomes an overwhelming task.' This is a contradiction to the earlier idea that there is generally too much emphasis on the risks when talking about entrepreneurship but it is made sense of within the framework of young business graduates. Arthur shifts back to talking about the rewarding moments to provide counter evidence to the risks. He portrays entrepreneurship as interesting, a totality, a lifestyle and a permanent role that one needs to inhabit from morning till night, thus, reproducing the entrepreneurial identity from a totality perspective. The totality image is, however, challenged by presenting the entrepreneurial ideal as someone with both sufficient entrepreneurial and life management skills in comparison to those entrepreneurs who sacrifice everything in trying to make a buck, who let their families go down the drain and ignore their own health and for whom social relations become solely utility functions. The ideal entrepreneurial situation is described through the various elements: a person who has managed to find a balance in life and in business, a company which has a healthy turnover but offers security to its employees and the entrepreneur who can conduct good social relations and enjoy the business. In this way the 'basic' entrepreneurs who concentrate on their core businesses and are good at it, who aim at stable or controlled growth rather than fast-growth with high risks are glorified. Those going after short term gains are interpreted as unreasonable risk takers, where the heavy burden placed on personal life is presented as a foolish route. This seems to be both the standard Arthur currently tries to live up to but in a more general sense it may well be an important reason why so few entrepreneurs aim for fast growth in the first place, which is one of the dominant research and policy debates.

6.7.8 Keeping busy

Having experienced bankruptcy where all control is lost for a while, Arthur is constructing a sense of security for the current business activities. They are not faced with any major threats; they have a secure position due to their strong competences and because they have thought through the business idea. In addition, through increased knowledge their personal capabilities are portrayed as much better than before as is their ability to deal with different situations. *'There is a lot of information available but one cannot know if one underestimates it.'* In a way Arthur believes that actively seeking information and using it for the benefit of the business is the cornerstone for the continued success of the company. The interpretation could be that although very much aware of the risks

and the incapability of the entrepreneur always to be in full control of the situation, the continuity of the business is dependent on of the ability to build a positive future and being able to imagine the enterprise surviving in the future.

Although the enterprise is secure it is not, however, stagnating. The company will soon launch a new product trying to penetrate the markets and if successful the new business activities will be divested into a new company. In addition, there have been some discussions about divesting the consulting business so that Arthur could leave behind the routines as a CEO and get more involved in the consulting business and devote more time to being on the boards of companies. This interest could be understood from the point-of-view of sharing of wisdom, which seems to develop into a more or less important endeavour for the mature entrepreneurs in my study (see also Rosemary's story chapter 6.1, p. 115 and Jonathan's story chapter 6.2, p. 139). A shift is made from the business to the personal future as these ideas are supported by 'maturity talk': Arthur's coming of age is taken as a point at which he frames his future plans to be conditional and dependent on his work motivation, mental capabilities and other work abilities, such as remaining in good health. Nevertheless, his dream is not of a peaceful retirement but meaningful work and if the above conditions remain and he continues to have something to contribute he will remain in the business. Ageing is interpreted mainly as a positive issue as it entails an improved capability of distinguishing between relevant and non-relevant issues, and even theoretical ideas interest him more nowadays than 'normal issues'.

Then, Arthur engages in building security for the stable future of the business by referring to the deep know-how they have developed in the niche sector with long-term contracts, which leave them untouchable by the cyclical developments taking place. This is constructed as the strategy for success.

Here more or less is the strategy of our success, it is no more than this. It is the strategy of being in the game, whether it'll be a success in due time is another matter but hopefully it will.

This quote takes us back to the idea of the successful and unsuccessful business and the difficulty of defining the time frame for it.

6.7.9 Discussion on Arthur's Entrepreneurial Identity

Arthur weaves his story by defining the category of 'chance' to frame his story. The situational factors are at the forefront in accounting for the

start-up decision. The difficulties with his former employer and the colloquial agreement to start a new business together with Arthur's experience as a CEO provide the basis for the start-up decision. In the story chance is given new meanings and underneath Arthur connects the various elements of his character (maladjusted, difficult, misfit) into his story as an entrepreneur. In addition, different life turns are woven into the story in a way that they give meaning to his life path, for example the time in Sweden is construed as meaningful because of the opportunities it gave for him to get into computers as early as in the 1970s.

The one, important strand of his story is the long winding route his education took, which is made sense of through the metaphor of the opening of new doors, new horizons. At the time of narrating the entrepreneurial story all doors are open and visible but as a protagonist in the story every time a new door opened it opened a view to another door. In this way opportunities are grasped one by one. The limited doors available in the first place are made sense through the environment of Arthur's youth: an industrial town where hard work is appreciated as opposed to gaining education. Through education, however, the doors were opened one by one. The stories of 'accidental entrepreneur and engineer' run parallel in the story. The chance element in these stories is further underlined by Arthur's focusing on interesting issues rather than on a goal-oriented career. In addition, the 'chance' element is made visible by presenting other available career options in the story (teacher, journalist) to further pinpoint the surprise of becoming an engineer and an entrepreneur.

The early days of the company are portrayed as high-flying, carefree times where the industry standards are taken at face value and decisions are made on the basis of the general economic atmosphere (for example acquiring property). Thus, Arthur's identity is not described as a strong-minded manager and leader but more as an inexperienced novice who goes with the flow and does not think for himself although the calculative, thoughtful side has been shown in the budgeting for the first years of the company. The high-growth figures and the business running smoothly blindfold Arthur and his partners and they do not anticipate nor prepare themselves for the setback to come. In a way Arthur's story could also be studied as a contemporary business story reflecting its own time. The frantic years of the overheating upswinging economy created a sense of being in business is easy that spilled over to the most cautious businesses. The ever-rising property prices (not to mention share prices), for example, created a belief that the wisest decision a company could take was to buy property, which is easy to criticise from today's perspective.

The bankruptcy is the great divider in Arthur's entrepreneurial story. He assumes responsibility for the bankruptcy and the poor economic situation is narrated to have been only a part of it. The explanation for the bankruptcy is the underestimation of information and knowledge which is reversed first through the sabbatical year where Arthur learns about business management issues and second through the change of beliefs and attitudes towards the business as new set of rules are entered into the company rule book and Arthur assumes the new identity position of a careful, thoughtful, perceptive but future-oriented entrepreneur. The calculation, analysing and weighing of decisions are key concepts in the telling of the story. The early sunny years with fast growth and expanding business that come to a halt in the bankruptcy are also reflected in Arthur's depiction of the entrepreneurial ideal and standard. Good entrepreneurs know how to balance their personal and business life creating a secure atmosphere for their employees. They concentrate on the core business, what they do best and what they enjoy and aim for a good financial outcome. Getting short-term gains and sacrificing all personal life is presented as a foolish route.

The future of the business is constructed as a secure and safe one emphasising the strategic position; a good team servicing a niche market and having long-term contracts with customers. In addition, the identity position of a careful, balanced entrepreneur, perceptive to the environment is applied to create a sense of security for the current business. In addition, Arthur sees his personal future to be in the business although accepting the limits of individual life. Arthur is not waiting for the merry days of retirement but is looking forward to having something meaningful to do as long as he has the capabilities and abilities.

6.8 Samuel's story

Samuel (late 30s) has a PhD in biochemistry from the university. After his dissertation he sets up an enterprise with two former colleagues from the university department. In the start-up phase the company is operating as a subcontractor but now it is currently involved in launching the first of its own products. The company has grown fast and currently employs nearly 60 people.

6.8.1 Presenting the Scene

Since biotechnology is a growing industry – or at least an industry with a lot of expectations in Finland in general and in the Turku region specifically I decide to try to locate a participant representing the industry. I contact a professor who is actively involved in researching and educating the field and ask her for some names. She suggests different possible candidates and I base my choice of the participant on two factors. I would like to find a fourth male participant for my study to balance the gender division at four male and four female entrepreneurs in the study. I am also reluctant to interview the most apparent choice in the field but I am interested in someone relatively unknown to the general public. This results in me contacting Samuel and I send him an e-mail early in December asking for an interview. When there is no reply I quickly give up hope but then suddenly during the Christmas holidays I receive a reply where he says that he is very busy but if it is still helpful he could meet me in early February. I get the feeling that he is either very, very busy (so busy that it gives me the chills – who can plan nearly two months ahead?) or that he hopes that the time suggested might be too late for me and he could escape by postponing for two months. Nevertheless, I accept his offer and we decide to meet in February. A week or so before the interview I send him another e-mail reminding him of our meeting and sending him the instructions that I have sent to other participants. On the day of the meeting I have still not received a confirmation from him so I call him to make sure that he is still available. On the phone he asks if it would be possible to limit the interview to an hour to which I agree. I drive to meet him at the company location. The offices are painted nearly all white and have a sort of clinical look, which might fit the industry quite well. We sit at a small meeting table in Samuel's office and he lays his mobile on the table. I turn on my tape recorder.

Early in the interview I get the feeling that it is not progressing the way I had planned it. The interview setting resembles a normal question-and-answer type of interview where Samuel expects frequent interventions. His answers are quite short and superficial and it seems that Samuel either does not have a story to tell or he is refusing to tell it for one reason or another. Everything seems unproblematic although challenging for him and yet we are talking about a biotech company, which is run by a former researcher. I would have expected to hear a different kind of story, a story with more paradoxes and difficulties. The problems are told in a rationalistic manner: nearly all emotions, feelings and personal thoughts as well as experiences are erased from the story, for example,

many problems are recounted as if they apply to the overall industry or to the companies in general and their relevance for Samuel's business is minimised or the connection is denied altogether. To accommodate Samuel's need for a normal interview I utilise my pre-understanding of entrepreneurship, small business management and even the biotechnology sector to keep asking questions for the duration of the hour we agreed on the phone earlier.

After the interview my immediate thought is to ponder whether to include Samuel's story in my material or not. However, I remind myself that the study is guided by the ideas of Tierney (2001) and Goodson (2001) that there is no bad material, no bad autobiographies. It is not my job to judge the story but to find out what the reason is for a participant to talk (or even not to talk) in a particular way about particular issues. These ideas convince me to accept Samuel's story as the story he wants to tell me and to start my analysis from there. In retrospect, the variety of the stories that were told to me as entrepreneurial life-stories is interesting. It would be false to expect or to present the idea that all the stories represent great dramas where the entrepreneur starts off with bare hands, faces a lot of difficulties, survives them and finally is the rich, successful entrepreneur who will tell their story to anyone who shows the slightest interest. In this sense it is even more important to include Samuel's story in this study.

It is possible to play with the ideas leading to the mutual problems between Samuel and myself and to construct a rich entrepreneurial life story for Samuel. Firstly, the situation at the enterprise is very hectic at the time of the interview, which means Samuel is really busy. So, he may have ignored my letter of advice and thus he is not geared towards the mood necessary for storytelling. Alternatively, he may have read my instructions but being in the midst of things he is not able to take them on board, which could provide a point of discussion about when and where we are able to tell our stories. In Samuel's current situation he may not be able to distance himself from the business activities and, therefore, there is not yet any story to tell but the story would come later (see also Czarniawska 1998, 29). Or, being a researcher himself Samuel knows what research is all about but coming from the life sciences he does not believe my invitation to tell a story is a legitimate one for generating data. It seems also that for Samuel it is more difficult to talk about the personal problems related to being an entrepreneur (and I am interested in the problems and struggles as I have already discussed for example in the story of Rosemary). He may not be willing to share his personal ideas and feelings with a complete stranger, which is also quite understandable.

It may be that with Samuel it would have been an advantage to talk to him more frequently to build up the needed trust (Atkinson 2002, 131-132).

6.8.2 Starting up

I ask Samuel of his background and he starts listing the various phases that provide a view of his professional history: He graduated from university in 1989, went to work for a large pharmaceutical company, relocated to the US for 18 months where he worked in R&D and returned to Finland in 1991. Then, some of the activities of the large enterprise were transferred to Sweden and Samuel had two weeks to decide whether to relocate there or to stay in Finland. He refused the transfer and, instead, went to the university to work as a lecturer and to continue his studies towards a dissertation. It is when he completes his doctorate he finds himself at a crossroads and has to decide whether to remain as a researcher at the university or to do something else. In this picture Samuel has multiple alternatives where he is in a position to weigh the different opportunities to choose the best (a similar idea is also presented in the story of Rosemary; 6.1, p. 115). In the department where he works the atmosphere is very pro-business and practice-oriented and his colleagues have strong contacts with business although they reside in the academia. It is this environment that was influential and supportive of the start-up. In addition, the students are very enthusiastic about doing something practical, which Samuel affirms by talking about his own student years and his interest towards the practical. It seems therefore that the environment which is supportive of the idea of applying theory to practice and the 'let's do it' atmosphere at the department are the keys for understanding Samuel's decision to go into entrepreneurship. At that point Samuel and two researcher colleagues decide to set up a firm. This decision Samuel presents as a seemingly unproblematic one: it was not something new in the department but was common and accepted practice. In addition, the business starts by doing subcontracting work for Samuel's previous employer, thus, it is a common working environment and not something completely new or exciting in that sense either.

Later in the interview I inquire about the important people for the entrepreneurship. He replies that '*then I would have to go further back*' but instead of talking about the people he engages in a story that he has always known that he would be involved in something practical. In the actual start-up phase, the team of three people were influential but Samuel places the situational factors at the forefront in his decision: he had fin-

ished his PhD, which represented a turning point in his life where a choice had to be made. The choice is then framed against the departmental environment, which was directed towards practical application and therefore stimulated the decision, which was always in the background.

The idea to start with subcontracting and later develop some products was, Samuel explains, a good way as it firstly facilitates teaching people how to work in the industry, for example, enabling learning about quality issues through subcontracting. Teaching people to work is defined as important due to the large number of new people that are recruited by the company. Secondly, through subcontracting it is possible to generate some cash flow. These are the reasons that are applied to explain why subcontracting was chosen as the start-up strategy by contrasting it to the choice of developing one's own products right from the very beginning although currently new products are being launched.

6.8.3 Fast-growing business

Growth and the problems with personnel

Ulla: *How many employees do you have?*

Samuel: *57.*

Ulla: *Yeah. That's quite fast growth?*

Samuel: *We've grown quite fast. On the other hand we could have chosen the route of just subcontracting...*

This is an example of how the categories of the interviewer affect the interviewee's storyline. I imply that the growth of the company has been quite fast and Samuel accepts this. Then, to explain that it has not been an unintended choice but the result of the chosen strategy he paints a picture of an alternative reality. Had they stayed within subcontracting the company would not have grown so fast and they would have ten to 15 employees at the moment. This route is not chosen because it would not have been personally satisfactory to be involved with the same routines day in day out. Later, Samuel often refers to the different challenges that the business or he personally is facing at the time of the interview or in the future. The choice to start developing company products could also be seen in this light, representing a challenge that is both meaningful and necessary, and in a similar vein the growth of the company is taken for granted due to the challenging route the company has chosen. In the story Samuel does not elaborate on what the expected or preferred limits of the growth will be. It is only when Samuel talks about his personal involvement in the company, where he expresses a wish not to work in a large

company which suggest that expanding the company into a large is the boundary that the company will not exceed. On the other hand, the large company is introduced in the story as a sign of the success and thus even it is worth aspiring towards but at that point Samuel might be ready to give up his personal involvement in the day-to-day business activities. So, the image given is that the growth opportunities are unlimited and Samuel is not engaged in setting boundaries on that growth. In this way Samuel belongs to the narrow niche of truly growth-oriented entrepreneurs in Finland. This may reflect the adopted industry standards and expectations.

In my wish to make the picture more blurred and complicated, and to investigate and scrutinize the problems related to entrepreneurship and in this case to the rapid growth I use my pre-understanding to raise issues which Samuel could complain about (Roulston et al 2001) and ask Samuel whether the growth rate of the company and personnel issues have any potential downsides. Samuel accepts my invitation to talk about problems related to personnel matters in expanding the company. However, he does not speak about the problems he has faced or the company has faced due to the growth but he takes up the point that a university education ignores personnel issues completely. He claims this is a major flaw since most university graduates work in supervisory posts at some point of their careers. He then confirms my suggestion that personnel issues are the most difficult issues in the business. Therefore, the problem of managing and leading personnel in a growing business is not interpreted from the entrepreneur position but more generally from the position of any university graduate. Samuel gives no examples of the problems he has personally had but uses the universality claim '*there is no tuition in it at the university, yet all university graduates will need the skills*'.

In my wish to generate a particular interview I tell Samuel that I am interested in quite particular concrete events and ask him to talk about more of them. On this occasion Samuel talks about employees who are mostly young and lack the references to and knowledge of real working life. Although being very eager they lack realism for example in salary issues where the expectations are much higher than is realistic. This narration could be interpreted as the problems Samuel and his business have faced during the first years of existence but this view is contested as Samuel notes that '*we have succeeded quite well in selecting good people*'... So, the problem does not really touch Samuel or his business but it is a more general problem affecting all companies and the industry. Nevertheless, the story and negotiation continues;

I see a lot that people who cannot work at work, but what do you do; hit them with a hammer on the head or what can you do? This deals with the day-to-day activities and they culminate in salary issues. What else?

The last question Samuel directs to himself, then takes a pause and confirms again the idea presented earlier '*but we have succeeded in our personnel choices*' making a distinction between the general problems and the personal problems. He continues his story about situations where it is necessary to hold serious discussions with employees when it is obvious that their interests are elsewhere and not focused on work and these situations are described as difficult occasions. It seems that Samuel is engaging in a continuous negotiation whether or not personnel issues are problematic in his business. The problems are presented as true as general ideas but it is difficult to know what kind of actual problems, if any, the company has experienced, who exactly has suffered from motivational problems, when and why. The possible lack of personnel problems is then made sense of by referring to the activities taken at the company to avoid such problems; the leisure activities organised at the company. These activities have the function of creating a feeling of togetherness and motivation that Samuel considers especially necessary since the company has four places of business. Near to the end of the interview I return to the issue to inquire whether dividing employees in four place causes problems. In his answer Samuel refutes my suggestion that this is a problem by saying that it works well but then immediately affirms that sometimes it causes problems. He then explains that it is not generally considered a problem due to the natural division of the locations. He subsequently refutes this by the stating that in the company they have purposefully placed people in different locations in order to ensure people visit other locations and to facilitate communication. Then, the problem is again brought to the forefront by Samuel's suggestion that '*It is a pain so if it is possible to organize otherwise it is good...*' This is another example of how meanings are negotiated in the story. At my suggestion, Samuel confirms that there are other potential facilities but for a small company with an uncertain future it is difficult to commit to certain locations for 50 years, which reflects the special problems small companies in volatile markets may experience.

At the end of the interview I return to the question of personnel and its availability. In Samuel's story it is not cited as a problem although previously the company has experienced some problems in locating programmers. The available explanation for the good pool of employees is given in presenting the Turku region as a good location for a company, which is

founded in it being a university city and by contrasting it to other places where it might be more difficult to find competent employees.

Role of Samuel in the growing company

I invent another possible source of problems by asking Samuel about the growth and the changes in Samuel's own role. Samuel takes up this theme and says he has to struggle with himself because traditionally he has been involved in all the phases and issues at the company so he is easily overworked. It is his job to delegate tasks and then to cease to be involved with them. We do not discuss how he copes with this but still it echoes the idea put forward in various studies of the necessity of role shifts when the business proceeds from the start-up phase to the growth phase.

Next Samuel moves on to discuss the problems linked with internal decision making systems and procedures that are difficult to manage in a growing company. However, in Samuel's words it is not so much of a problem for him personally but for others in the business. With the growth of the firm the organisational structure and the friendship structure become differentiated resulting in a new organisational structure that has a new chain of command and responsibilities. Sometimes, however, decisions are made within the old structure since it is easily accessible, decisions are made automatically at the coffee table through a friend, which of course causes frictions and tensions with those who are administratively responsible for the issues. In the story Samuel emphasises that when the organisational structure with its responsibilities differs from the friendship structure it needs to be focused and paid attention to. Appropriate action needs to be taken and it is important to communicate '*saying it aloud*' if one wishes to avoid hassle. In addition, in the technology industry the who-knows-what structure is often more powerful than who-is-responsible-for-what structure where (technological) knowledge equals power. Therefore, the need for communication is further underlined.

Due to my interest in the problems and challenges present in entrepreneurship I am also curious about the risks and Samuel's interpretation of them in the business.

Ulla: *Well, in the beginning did you think about the risks, the business risks and did you consider what would happen if it didn't work out?*

Samuel: *Yes, I thought about the risks to some extent. That they are in an enterprise, this business is always [about risks], and it*

never ends because new ones come all the time. It depends if you choose the model whereby you do only one thing [same] and then continue with it, then you can manage it but always when you do something there is always risk involved. I sort of, sort of thought of about it, I went through it, read a book for business starters even and learned to understand these things. I did go through it to some extent but I don't know...

Ulla: *It did not scare you...?*

Samuel: *Well, it was also scary, it's not that but it won in the scale of things, when the alternative was I would have gone somewhere to do the 8 to 4 thing. I did think about it to some extent.*

On this occasion I introduce the risks and the issue of being scared of them as normal issues linked with the setting up of the business. Samuel is partially willing to accommodate my view by claiming that he was aware of the risks attached to entrepreneurship and aimed at reducing them by increasing his knowledge and skills in the area. However, being scared did not develop into an obstacle for going into the business since it weighed less on the scale than working for 8 to 4, and being involved in something unchallenging.

6.8.4 Enjoying life as an entrepreneur

Being practical

The story of enjoyment derived from entrepreneurship starts from the opportunity of doing independent jobs and the responsibility for one's own actions that comes along with it; *'if the business is doing well or badly, I can always look in the mirror'*. This is the immediate answer but it is followed by a more personal account *'for me maybe the fact that I can apply the things that I've studied into practice is the most rewarding part for myself'*. This can be understood against Samuel's background in research at the university and in the R&D activities in the large pharmaceutical company prior to entrepreneurship. Those jobs quite possibly involved rather independent projects with a strong sense of responsibility for the activities undertaken and similarly it is easy to understand that in those different worlds the practicality of work may have been at a lesser level than in Samuel's current position. In addition, the versatility of the job is described as rewarding in the story which is intensified by listing the variety of tasks that he deals with: *'financing, setting up the biotechnological production, quality issues, being involved a little bit in marketing... It is a good thing that I do not have to do the same things from one day to*

another'. On the other hand, the other side of the versatility coin is also represented as Samuel tells about the decisions he has to make and of his input in the company and he revisits the theme of his role in expanding the company. In the company where the number of personnel has doubled twice over the past two years, the growth represents a challenge in the small firm. The size of the challenge is made visible by the use of the 'doubled twice,' which underlines the magnitude and by comparing it to the growth rate of a large firm where it is an impossibility to double the personnel. Then, Samuel returns to his original idea that this versatility is a stimulus.

From this story it is possible to see the overall construction of a success or the positive story that Samuel wants to tell. In this short episode the 'other side of the coin' is mentioned but it is not made into a story, it remains vague and incomplete. A suggestion is made that it deals with the possible frustrations that Samuel has in adapting to his role in the growing business.

In the following section I make a more general enquiry about the nature of Samuel's tasks as an entrepreneur:

Ulla: *What does your job involve, what are the primary tasks, the big parts of the job?*

Samuel: *It is a job for a jack-of-all-trades labourer... **laughter** Big parts? Working at the board, working on the management team and being responsible for some of the bigger projects. They are the three big chunks. Then there is a lot of mishmash, a lot of e-mails.*

The mention of e-mails leads Samuel to talk about what a burden e-mail is in current business life where he describes the many e-mails he receives daily that he needs to at least glance at even if he isn't required to do something more about them. At this point I realize why the interview may have started off on the wrong foot. I sent the instructions by e-mail and it seems that Samuel has either not read them at all or maybe he has just glanced them through.

To help Samuel tell his story of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial life, I provide him with another ingredient that he may use (derived from the other stories that I conducted for this study) by asking him about the time he spent in the large pharmaceutical company and his feelings about the large enterprise environment. Samuel states he did not think about it at the time (lacking the point of reference now available to him with his entrepreneurial experience of the small business environment) but currently the environment does not appear to be very lucrative to him. He

legitimises his claim by telling a story of a programmer who transferred from Nokia to work in their company who thoroughly enjoys taking the full responsibility for a larger entity and not just for a small piece of something without even knowing exactly what the larger entity is. Performing small tasks is presented as a dull activity unless the individual is of certain kind and prefers working only from 8 to 4 -style. In this story Samuel takes the issue away from his personal story of working in another, large organisation and, instead, he provides a story of an employee whose experiences are shared rather than his own. This could indicate that Samuel is not willing to share his personal views on the matter or that the experiences of others are provided to legitimise his own opinions and views. Then Samuel brings in the story of the challenges of the expanding business, how to organize work. The options to consider are the options splitting the work in small pieces, which would seem the most efficient way of doing things or to give people total responsibility for what they do. He is negotiating between the entrepreneurial way and the traditional managerial way of organising the work. Total responsibility is most effective for those who want challenges but not for those working from 8 to 4 who do not enjoy a job where one needs to take responsibility *‘that something happens, and jobs are not just delivered on the table...’*

It seems that the prevailing cultural understanding of both being an entrepreneur and more largely of being a devoted, enthusiastic and responsible worker does not correspond with the Finnish office working hours (from 8 to 4). The devoted worker like the entrepreneur needs to work flexibly, not counting the hours but devoting all the time needed to get things done. This fits badly with the idea of having small children where daycare centres are organized around the 8 to 4 structure (the problem introduced in Jonathan’s story 6.2, p. 139). On the other hand, the notion is about more than merely the hours but it is applied to show that one takes full responsibility for the work. The idea of being an entrepreneur is being coloured by the idea of being ‘on call all day’, 24 hours a day (compare with Eliza’s story 6.3, p. 160).

Entrepreneurial framework conditions

Ulla: *In the media, there is a lot of discussion to promote entrepreneurship...*

Samuel: *I know nothing of it.*

Ulla: *From your personal experience point-of-view, what do you think of it...*

First, Samuel claims not to know anything about the promotion of entrepreneurship in Finland and he is detaching himself from the discussions. He does however agree to talk about the issue from his personal point-of-view. From this position Samuel believes that many are fooled into entrepreneurship because those actively engaging in the promotion are not really aware of the realities of entrepreneurship and they are not involved in organising the framework. The image portrayed is that due to the speeches and propaganda many have foolishly been lured into entrepreneurship and into silly ventures, for example, getting into entrepreneurship because of the lack of alternatives, which then end up badly. This is in contrast to Samuel's own experience where he portrayed the availability of several alternatives. This view is however diluted '*I assume so, but there should be some more research results*'. The role for the promoters should be enlarged to cover the other side, i.e. not only promoting the good sides of entrepreneurship but revealing also the other side of the coin, for example the fierce competition.

In Samuel's story the biotechnology sector is described as experiencing small circles of financing although progress in this respect has been made. This paints a picture that companies in the field may lack financing but the issue is not touched upon with regard to Samuel's company. Then, Samuel talks about the early attempts to build up technology parks and science parks that were not tailored for production companies but contained only office facilities. This is legitimised by the experience the company had in trying to get an incubator in the beginning of the activities. Although currently the situation has improved and the parks currently also have production facilities, in Samuel's story this serves an example of political activity and decisions focused on doing something but not really realising what needs to be done? Later, I return to the theme of science valleys and parks again, which directs Samuel to talk about the need for concrete actions and joint activities before any synergy is created from operating in a valley or village. This is contrasted against the creation of 'unnecessary images' and charging higher prices under these false pretences. For example, in Samuel's view a science park without a co-ordinator is a useless one.

Then Samuel lists other conditions by listing the things a company needs to manage its business... *facilities, financing, and marketing channels*. Then he takes up the last point and elaborates on it to construct a need for more help to develop marketing channels although Finnpro is presented as acting in a reasonable manner, for example, setting up opportunities for joint-stands at expensive fairs. '*If a company comes from Eastern Finland or elsewhere they have a hard time screening the agents*

to pick out the crooks'. The problem regarding screening and selecting agents is removed from Samuel's company by making it a problem for companies located in Eastern Finland. This idea is then further legitimised by the notion that the company already has agents in many countries and is currently in the process of locating them in other countries as well. In addition, the company receives a lot of direct queries and with the subcontracting work no marketing has been necessary.

6.8.5 Family issues

In the interview Samuel introduces the question of the bad sides in entrepreneurship by referring to my earlier question. He wonders how much time he has for his family but dilutes this potential bad side by saying '*if you truly enjoy what you're doing, you don't count it the same way*'. This suggests that the personal fulfilment derived from work is enough to compensate for the potential lack of opportunities to spend time with the family. Overall, Samuel does not see any bad sides with entrepreneurship but it is described as fun, something worth maintaining in entrepreneurship over time. Later in the interview I return to the question of not having time for the family by asking if it is something which causes discussions at home (see also my question to Jonathan). Samuel affirms that it causes some discussion at home but he does not identify it as a major problem. Samuel explains the necessity of realising that it is possible to spend all one's time at the company and to realise the need to take some breaks. Thus, Samuel explains that he does not have this problem due to his ability to remind himself of the issue (not to spend all his time at the enterprise) and by taking breaks.

Then, entrepreneurship is paralleled to the building of a house and the potential difficult times if the marriage or the relationship is not strong enough and could possibly be the last straws that breaks the camel's back.

Samuel: *But its not like that for us.*

Ulla: *Yeah?*

Samuel: *Of course it can be, it is known from the statistics. Building a house is a bad time [for a relationship].*

This is an interesting metaphor. Building a house and being an entrepreneur are identified as possible risks for the family and the relationship. Building a house in the Finnish context often means very active involvement in the building process although turnkey deliveries are also becoming more common. Still, to reduce the high costs it is common for the husband to spend all his spare time at the site. Although possibly not competent to do many of the major chores he takes care of the minor

ones, cleaning up, painting, etc. In the eyes of the husband he is building a home for his family and this legitimises his absence from home where the wife spends all her evenings alone with the children. The problems are made worse by the often very tight budget, and many couples are at least in the everyday parlance known to end in a divorce. Similarly I have argued previously that due to the role of being the primary breadwinner (and not the caretaker) it is legitimised in the stories of family men to concentrate on the entrepreneurship, which might sometimes take place at the expense of family time. For the women the relationship, the peaceful co-existence of family life and entrepreneurial life need to be made more explicit and sensible for the fear of being labelled with the bad mother image.

6.8.6 Constructing the future

Future for the business

The future for the company is construed as promising as long as the hard-work and active touch in progressing ideas is maintained within the company. The challenge for Samuel, who returns to pondering upon his own role and the challenges it involves, is that he believes it is important to concentrate on one area. However, he finds it difficult to identify the right area, to pinpoint exactly where the value added by his role is at a maximum. The shift in working style is depicted in the change from affecting all issues directly to working through others and motivating them to do things his way '*if it's a good way*'. In this way Samuel first presents the picture that in the future employees will adopt his way of doing things and he will only be challenged if they are not the best way. He does not however state who is responsible for judging the goodness. Secondly, he identifies with a laugh the need to '*take listening into his product portfolio*'. The use of a marketing metaphor is applied possibly to make the idea a bit funny, thus pointing out the contradiction, which may help to underline that currently, listening is not his strength. Thirdly, a new balance needs to be established between internal and external issues in the company, thus, returning to the company-level and the need to shift focus in the company from organising the internal issues (production, personnel) to focusing on customers and markets. On this occasion Samuel points to the lack of negotiation skills within the education framework of the university, skills which are necessary for all university graduates. This construction is similar to the lack of employee management issues in the university studies remarked on earlier. This remark in-

vites me to enquire whether Samuel has looked for additional training, and he confirms that he has participated in an executive education programme but lacks the time resources to complete it. He, however, acknowledges the need for a basic business education because it is also introduced as a requirement from the financiers. On this occasion the differences could be drawn between the loan financiers and venture capitalists, where the latter are known to be actively involved in the business activities. Samuel lists the financiers of the company and claims that the relationships with them have been good so far. Next, he warns (other entrepreneurs?) not to be naïve in business emphasising the need to take financial management seriously, which is supported by the experience the company has had in scanning financiers that has made the company aware of the time requirements that are involved. '*Surely not many people realize how much time it takes*' as it is necessary to reserve a year to the financing round which might consume the time reserved for actualising the investment. Besides the time constraints Samuel also emphasises the additional work that comes a long. With regard to protecting intellectual property rights it is in the first phase of financial negotiations when they are required but the necessity of them should be understood at the beginning of an enterprise, even before risk financing is taken in. It is not clear if these problems are something that Samuel has encountered himself, or whether these are just problems that any high-technology firm might encounter.

When asking about the credibility problems associated with a start-up firm Samuel hastily replies that they have not had them. On this occasion Samuel refuses my invitation to complain by refuting my categorization. The whole idea makes him look a bit stunned and he then explains that the idea has never even crossed his mind. In his story he states the necessity for the entrepreneur to believe in the idea or otherwise it makes life quite uneasy and at the same time he refutes the idea that the credibility question has ever been raised with regard to his enterprise. The legitimacy for the existence of the business is taken for granted.

Samuel's personal future in the business

The big fear for Samuel is that the business grows and that he ends up working in a large company. The fear is however a paradox because the large company would also represent a success. Getting a foot in the door, a successful launch of their own products and making a profit would culminate in the growth of the company. The fear is explained by Samuel's role in the business as he is reluctant to be involved in dealing

merely with administrative routines, his interests are directed towards the challenges of matching marketing with technology. There is a pause in Samuel's story and I start asking something else, however, Samuel continues his previous story showing that the pause was only a thinking pause. He continues to talk about the challenges linked to the marketing and human side. These are real challenges which are construed to be the primary challenges the company faces and the R&D challenges are merely technical issues and are therefore presented as easy to solve. Marketing is something that Samuel wants to learn properly in addition to the management and leadership issues, which are construed as tricky but interesting challenges for him personally in the business.

6.8.7 Discussion on Samuel's entrepreneurial identity

The story of the set-up and growth is rather uncomplicated in Samuel's story as they are both taken for granted. First, in setting up the company the metaphor of the crossroads is given to convey the image of an individual facing several opportunities and alternatives but due to the influence and support provided by the surroundings at the time the person is inclined to select the entrepreneurial career, which is further emphasised by the personal theory of belonging to the world of practice. It is the lure and attractiveness of the practical that is construed as meaningful in Samuel's entrepreneurial story and identity although other issues are also taken up, such as independence, responsibility and the versatility attached to the job description. Similarly, the growth of the company is taken for granted and the future growth opportunities are portrayed as unlimited. The only limitation is Samuel's reluctance to head a large company but even that scenario is construed as a positive one since it would demonstrate the successes of the company.

Contrary to my expectations Samuel does not provide an account that overlaps with the other stories in terms of the problems, difficulties and challenges. My expectation is instructed by the understanding that the biotechnology sector is linked with modest cash flows and long-term product development projects that in my interpretation would necessitate them to be emphasised in the story. Samuel's story, however, points out that he does not narrate his stories against all the other potential entrepreneurial stories that there might be but the story is built from his personal position of having a long track record in the industry, which governs his understanding. He does not have any experience of the service sector, thus, the lack of major investments in the service sector is not applied as a resource in the construction of his entrepreneurial story.

The story is told as a general story lacking in details of actual events and Samuel's personal experiences. It may be that the importance of such data is not accepted or not understood as meaningful in Samuel's story, or the events taking place are too close to the narrator at the time thus making it difficult to actively engage in the interpretation of these events.

7. LEAVING THE SCENE

7.1 Summarising the aims of the research

In this research, I have investigated how an individual constructs being an entrepreneur (see Figure 2). In the analysis, I have focused on the meanings the entrepreneurs give to entrepreneurship, the way they construct entrepreneurship to be a meaningful and sensible endeavour both at the time of making the move into entrepreneurship and at the present time, the identity positions that the individuals take and how the entrepreneurial identity co-exists with other identity positions. For the purposes of this study I conducted eight life-story interviews with different entrepreneurs from different industries with different backgrounds. My aim was to produce heterogeneity in the stories that were narrated. I have analysed these stories with regard to the contents (what is said), the story formats (the structure and ways parts of text are connected) and the interpersonal function of the language (the way the stories were generated in the interview) (Riessman 1993, 21). However, in order to understand the meanings attached to these stories it also became important to analyse them in their contextual settings meaning both the individually constructed personal setting and the general economic and social environment that marks the larger scenery for all enterprises. It is important to also allow possibilities for different interpretations. Describing entrepreneurship embedded in social reality makes visible both the dynamics inherent to the process and the personal theories that form the framework for the activities (see also Katila 2000, 228)

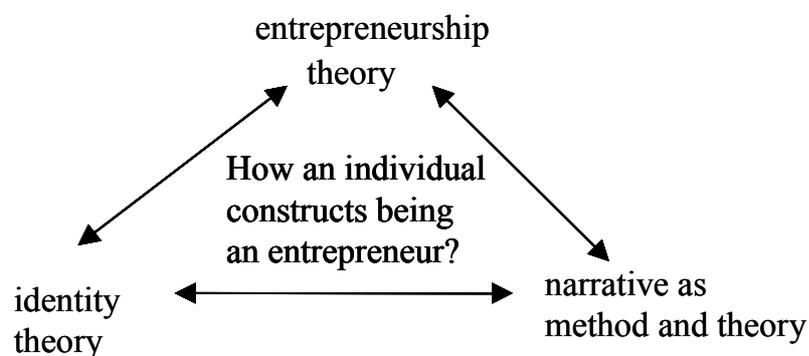


Figure 2 Revisiting the research approach and the main themes of the study

In this study, I have applied identity theory and analysed the identity constructions of the participants through the use of narrative method and theory in order to make sense of entrepreneurship (its meaning, role) in the lives of the participants. In this chapter I will discuss the theoretical implications of the approach chosen – looking at entrepreneurship through the identity theory lens and the narrative lens – and the contribution I have been able to make to the theory and methodological discussion in entrepreneurship research. Then, in a more general manner I will discuss the possibilities the methodological choice (narrative research) has to offer and finally I will outline a few suggestions for further research. My idea of theory implications is closely related to the methodological possibilities offered by the narrative perspective.

7.2 Theoretical implications of the research

7.2.1 Contextualising knowledge

I started my research with the theories of identity. However, identity is not a real life phenomenon but a social construction, therefore, there are different ways to analyse and argue about identities (Kurvinen 1999, 331). The participants in the study have different ways to integrate entrepreneurship as part of their identity. The meaning of entrepreneurship is different for the participants and my analysis has focused on the different I-stories – the kind of entrepreneurial identities that were narrated. In the analysis, I have also analysed how the participants approached constructing the good entrepreneur, the ideal entrepreneur in the moral story and how they attached their own identity stories to the ideal entrepreneur story.

This study suggests that treating entrepreneurs as an overall, general category, thereby defining entrepreneurship as the first and foremost activity that structures the life of the individual as opposed to other categories, such as family or professional identity helps to provide an air of mystique to entrepreneurs. More importantly many of the paradoxes or ambiguities will remain unsolved. Research actively participates in placing the entrepreneur in a particular category where the members share certain characteristics, which constitute a particular identity for entrepreneurs (Warren – Fassett 2002, 582). Life is not black and white and entrepreneurship is therefore presented in the life stories to be both about problems and challenges as well as joys and fulfilment (see also May 2001, 278). Entrepreneurship was primarily presented as a positive phe-

nomenon in these stories, even those that had been previously sceptical of it had come to accept and cherish it as a solution that fitted their life and the contextual circumstances. The participants in this study accepted the entrepreneurial identity and eagerly narrated their stories from that position except for Marge who in her story aimed at finding a way to combine the journalist identity with the entrepreneurial identity, and to develop the entrepreneurial identity from the journalist identity. In the traditional approach entrepreneurs have been understood to be firstly entrepreneurs, there has not been much room for entrepreneurs to negotiate between the different roles in their lives. In this study I have deemed that the categories of enterprise and family, for example, are not stable and static but the entrepreneurs can flexibly and continually (although not always consciously) rearrange these textual components in order to provide coherent, contextual accounts of their actions. This study helps to dissolve the myopia reproduced in studies of entrepreneurs about the inherent totality of the entrepreneurial essence. (See also Fournier – Lightfoot 1997, 30-31.) For those interested in studying entrepreneurs this translates as the need to consider the other roles the entrepreneurs have besides the entrepreneurial role. For researchers engaging in identity research it is important not to assume that entrepreneurship will permeate the whole identity of the person.

In these stories, the entrepreneurs are constructing meaning for their lives and identities but at the same time they are assigning identities to others – their identity needs to be narrated against others, it does not and cannot exist in a vacuum. In these stories the ‘others’ were other entrepreneurs who were depicted, for example, as losers unable to defend themselves, the greedy entrepreneurs going after short-term gains and fast cars and the stable and mature business owners not interested in innovations or business development. In addition, bank managers and bureaucrats were described in a particular light, which differed greatly from entrepreneurs in general. Furthermore, my identity as a researcher was placed in the ‘other’ category since many of the participants framed their experiences to fit my understanding of the world and to form common ground for communication. The stories portrayed entrepreneurs as both belonging to the social category of entrepreneurs, which differed from the non-entrepreneurial identities (bureaucrats, bank managers and researchers). However, the distinctions made between other entrepreneurs serve to construct a specific entrepreneurial identity for the individual in question that differs from the general category. Being similar and different at the same time is inherent to these entrepreneurial stories. The entrepreneurs were able to both belong to the group of entrepreneurs but at

the same time disengage themselves from it and attach themselves to a particular sub-group of entrepreneurs (e.g. knowledge-based entrepreneurs, innovative entrepreneurs) or to claim a more individually constructed identity (e.g. 'lazy entrepreneur').

The entrepreneurs make use of the discursive resources available to them to give new meanings to the events they have experienced. For example, negative experiences can be introduced in the stories as meaningful learning experiences (for further analysis of learning experiences see Hytti 2002). These paradoxes are inherent to the stories. The difficult times that are constructed as learning experiences were painful and traumatic events that are vividly described in the stories. At the same they are also depicted as needed and necessary experiences, where the participant has gone through the experience, survived and learned from the experience and is currently stronger and better equipped to face new difficulties and challenges. It could be argued that for the successful continuation of business activities it is important for an entrepreneur to look at negative experiences in a certain way. Entrepreneurs have a pool of experiences that they can apply to give meaning to new emerging events. The events that take place form a part of entrepreneurial life where the events are tied into the everyday life. Hence, experience is an important ingredient in forming entrepreneurial life. The different routes the participants followed affected their entrepreneurial careers and the stories told about those careers produced different interpretations from the similar events. The experiences that precede and form the entrepreneurial career all contribute to structure entrepreneurship and the story. For example, Eliza draws from her former experiences in employment and self-employment to give meaning to her current life as an entrepreneur. The different generations of entrepreneurs in the study also allow for different interpretations as the decisions are made at different times – while the industrial community limited the available career choices of a young man at one time, its existence was perceived but it allowed for more opportunities at a later time. This is of course a simplification but it demonstrates how the interpretations are connected to the lives of the individuals but also to time.

The active meaning-making processes shed new light on understanding for example entrepreneurial motives. Although unemployment, redundancy or lack of job opportunities formed the background of many of the entrepreneurs in this research, it was not constructed to have a similar meaning in all of the stories. It is possible to understand unemployment to be merely a necessary trigger needed to start business activities and to seek an entrepreneurial career that may have been a long-lived ambition.

Alternatively, entrepreneurship may represent an escape from the unemployment although paid work might be the preferred alternative if it existed with reasonable terms. Individual and social contexts affect both the experiences and what and how the individuals can tell of them (May 2001, 278). Thus, it is difficult to group the entrepreneurs with unemployment background into just one group since the entrepreneur's understanding of the role and meaning of unemployment for their entrepreneurial career differs in the different stories. Therefore, I suggest researchers be cautious in assuming that entrepreneurs coming from a similar background or operating in a particular field would interpret the background and field in a similar way. They should rather be active in aiming at understanding what kind of meanings the entrepreneurs give to them in order to avoid reproducing existing taken-for-granted results.

Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) suggest that entrepreneurs need to become skilled cultural operatives who can develop stories of who they are and how their resources or ideas will lead to future benefits for financiers, investors and customers. In fact, they suggest that this skill is the most valuable for a new venture in order to legitimise its activities. I suggest that the skill is needed not only at the beginning of an entrepreneurial career, but throughout it and especially in crisis situations that need to be made sense of and integrated in the story of the entrepreneur in a meaningful way (see also Cunliffe 2001). If decision-making related to whether a person becomes an entrepreneur is not simply a rational choice that deals with the function of personal characteristics and skills and market potential then it has to be about how we see ourselves, to whom we identify with.

Although entrepreneurs may narrate their own stories and give different interpretations to their experiences they also make use of existing social reserves. For example, the enterprise and management discourse emerges in these entrepreneurial stories in a way that the stories could be seen to partly belong to and be a part of forming the canonised entrepreneurial discourse 'this is what entrepreneurs are supposed to tell of entrepreneurship'. For example, the way entrepreneurs reinforced person-centred or trait explanations of their success or of entrepreneurship (e.g. responsibility, hardworking, non-conformity to authority) (see also Olson 2002) contributed to our understanding of the freedom that is the most rewarding aspect in entrepreneurship. However, at the same time the entrepreneurs were also able to contest some of the existing truths and taken-for-granted issues and they actively created new or differentiated meanings even in the areas that have strong traditions in management talk and discourse. For example, the talk of employees as the 'heart'

of the company or of subcontractors as the 'friend businesses' helps to create these relationships in emotional, non-economic terms that counter the traditional, mainstream views of employees or networking relationships in management talk which emphasises the utility function of them. Thus, the stories could be viewed as sites for both reproducing entrepreneurial myths and for resisting and contesting them.

This research highlights the fact that entrepreneurship is not solely an economic phenomenon but it also touches the emotional and personal spheres of life (although the public and personal sphere divide may also be contested as one of the taken for granted 'facts' in entrepreneurship research, see e.g. Ahl 2002, 164-165). Difficulties in the personal sphere, for example, illnesses in the family, migrate to the economic sphere as the entrepreneur lacks the motivation, time and energy needed to devote to the business, which creates a risk to the business. This is not to argue, however, that all small business people are totally emotional or irrational in their decision-making but rather I suggest that the fusion of rational and emotional thinking exists in a way where one cannot be without the other (Carr 2001, 421). In difficult times the realisation that the lives of employees are deeply affected by the future of the firm is an important aspect in many entrepreneur's decision to remain in the business. This belongs both to the rational sphere (being responsible for employment in the rational and economic terms) and the irrational sphere (feeling responsibility for the destinies of the employees).

In my choice of entrepreneurs for this study I aimed for heterogeneity (5.1, p. 91) in the study by looking for entrepreneurs with different backgrounds and routes to entrepreneurship and hence, possibly, different stories of entrepreneurship to tell. Although the motivation and decision to go into entrepreneurship varies from one story to another, the participants refer to experiences that form the basis for them finding themselves 'at a crossroads' (pondering what to do, weighing options or finding entrepreneurship to be the sole alternative). It must be noted that these experiences are subjectively perceived - weighing alternatives and including entrepreneurship in them or viewing entrepreneurship to be the only alternative are not objectively available alternatives but belong to the subjective realm of identity construction of the participants. The stories of entrepreneurs in this study support the ideas that these stories are not just any entrepreneurial life-stories but they are embedded in their contextual settings (Jack – Anderson 2002). It is possible to read many of these stories as contemporary stories reflecting their time. In many ways it is possible to identify how the employment and labour market situations in the 1990s have been influential in framing the stories. Losing a job and find-

ing a new one in the early 1980s' is constructed as less of a struggle than in midst of the recession in the early 1990s. Many of those that started their entrepreneurial careers in the 1990s seem to point towards the lack of other opportunities and having nothing to lose by going into entrepreneurship. Thus, it is necessary to view the life stories embedded in their historical context (Goodson 2001). The early 1990s was a difficult era in the Finnish economic and labour market and the influences of it are traceable in the stories of the entrepreneurs in this study. Furthermore, these are stories told by entrepreneurs involved in different kind of companies, in different phases of the life-cycle and in different sectors where these factors come across in the stories: a young IT entrepreneur with a business degree tells and frames the story differently (identifying as a CEO in the world of fast wins and fast cars) from a more mature entrepreneur active in a more traditional sector who increases our understanding of how we are not completely free to tell our stories but some of the norms or the ways we speak are so strong that we need to incorporate them in our stories even if we renounce from these norms or ideals. The industry is present in the stories to varying degrees, as it is not a uniform category that can be interpreted equally. It is even possible to argue that industry is merely a category invented for statistical purposes, not an objectively identifiable context and its' presence in the different stories varies. For this reason I have been wary of overemphasising the role of the industry unless it is a pervading part of the story.

7.2.2 Stretching beyond method: problems and solutions

The idea of contextual and embedded knowledge that cannot be separated from the knower is also an interesting discussion from the point-of-view of whether these research results are applicable to other contexts – can these research results travel or can they only be understood in the narrow Finnish context? The context is important in the sense that I do believe for example that without taking into account the extremely difficult economic recession in the Finnish context one could not really understand how and why a business graduate with appropriate working experience interprets entrepreneurship to be the only option for him at the time. One has to know the context before truly understanding the experience of having no options. Similarly, some of the trends in the context of this research are not necessarily globally acknowledged but at least known in Western countries, like for example the difficulties older people have in finding work, or the problems of business transfers and succession when the large post-war generations (born in the late 1940s and

early 1950s) face retirement. Therefore, the story of a woman over forty finding it difficult to find a permanent job echoes throughout Europe and it can be argued that the Finnish context is not much different or more difficult than other contexts in this sense. These are examples of the issues I could pinpoint to belong to the baskets of results that either are or are not contextually laden but then there is the group of results that I find much more difficult to assess since I am part of and embedded in this culture and context as well. Do we Finns as the members of a particular culture and history interpret entrepreneurship in a particular way that could be seen from these results? At least it seems that entrepreneurship has pervaded our culture as a ‘common good’ that many admire but few practice. The entrepreneurs in this study were proud of the label ‘entrepreneur’ and willingly narrated their stories for the receptive audience and told stories of how their new position had been recognised and admired by friends, family and members of the local communities. Are we assigning entrepreneurs a particular identity of admirable but unreachable people that once belonged to other professional groups (for example teachers or priests)? Does this narrow super person identity or image that for example the media produces (Pietiläinen 2001, 87) help to explain the entrepreneurial paradox in Finland? From a more methodological point-of-view this example demonstrates the embeddedness of the researcher in the culture she is studying, thus, making it impossible for the researcher to step out of the culture and view it as a stranger.

In addition to the media, the identity or image of an entrepreneur has also been narrow in entrepreneurship research. Entrepreneurs have been understood as the agents in the capitalist system – and researchers have focused on understanding *his* roles in the economic system and the masculine personality attributes that are supposedly congruent with these roles. The abilities of risk-taking, need for achievement, dominance, aggressiveness, independence evoke an image of a hero²¹ (see also Mitchell 1997 and Ahl 2002). Research has aimed at profiling and characterising the entrepreneur, viewing entrepreneurs as the necessary economic agents and entrepreneurship as a good, desirable phenomenon (or outcome). These assumptions have rarely been questioned. This idea has been summed up in another dissertation study; “*no one knows what this creature really is like, but most agree that it is a very good and useful one, and is to be kept and nourished*” (Ahl 2002, 46) (see also section

²¹ Ogbor (2000, 617) interprets this from the Anglo-Saxon and American point-of-view to be close to the first white male European who discovered and conquered the land of opportunity, thus, drawing parallels with the history of the United States and research and theory building in entrepreneurship.

8.3). Thus, the understanding of entrepreneurs has been narrow, unchallenged and laden with certain assumptions on the nature of entrepreneurship that have been taken for granted.

From this point-of-view ethnic and female entrepreneurs have come to be viewed as deviant cases (not central or persistent elements of the society) and the ahistorical and decontextualised nature of these studies have added to our understanding of women being faulty (too cautious, too risk-averse). This sets aside the perspective of the processes through which knowledge is constructed and dismisses the sociological, historical and other political factors that have contributed to this view leaving the entrepreneur to psychological determinism. This is not solely a matter of theoretical debate but can be seen to affect entrepreneurial practice. For example, the female entrepreneurs in this study presented several 'truths' regarding female entrepreneurs of facing difficulties in obtaining loans, refusing to use the family home as collateral. These 'truths' are presented in a way that suggests these qualities are inherent characteristics to female entrepreneurs, thus, echoing the research results that have compared men (the dominant core) and women (the deviant, marginal case). The female entrepreneurs in this study seem to be producing a female entrepreneur's story by creating it against the male story (the latter is more risk-taking, bold and materialistic), thus identifying at least partly as female entrepreneurs although often creating a gender neutral identity as professionals in the business. The question remains, however, whether the entrepreneurial space for marginal groups has already been defined by institutional and historical conditions. For example, it is not questioned in the dominant entrepreneurial discourse whether loan officers have a gender-stereotypic view that emphasises the traditional female qualities (of care, nurturance) and de-emphasise the traits that are stereotypically male-managerial. It could be argued therefore that the restriction of women into 'entrepreneurial ghettos' may have less to do with their female qualities (of risk aversion, etc) than suffering from a 'stereotype threat' whereby women's performance might be affected by society's stereotype of women. The ideological system that we help to create thus legitimises and institutionalises not only entrepreneurial research but also the praxis. (Ogbor 2000, 625-627.)

In this study, I have attempted to avoid falling into the same traps but I cannot claim that I have totally succeeded. By talking about women in this study and the way they position themselves towards men I have been part of producing the category of female entrepreneurs. Similarly, I emphasised the way family is incorporated in the stories of women with families and the way it is excluded from the stories of men. The problem

with this is that it invites a comparison and implicitly a hierarchy between women and men (Ahl 2002, 186). To find a solution to this problem I tried to be reflexive about the categories that I created and I also investigated avenues for men to include the family into their entrepreneurial lives. Thus, I have attempted to move beyond the immediate – women are different from men – conclusion and searched for the different ways families are included in the entrepreneurial life stories of men and women alike.

It also became important to analyse and interpret the entrepreneurial stories in relation to the whole life story although most participants narrated their stories from the entrepreneurial position. However, understanding how entrepreneurial stories belonged to a particular lifestory enabled reflexivity with regard to the interpretation of the entrepreneurial event. My point is that by providing an holistic account of the entrepreneurial aspect of the lives of the participants where it coincides, conflicts or strengthens the other aspects of their lives, provides a more insightful account of the entrepreneurial identity than by focusing solely on the story of the entrepreneur. Thus, it was possible to interpret the actions from the personal theories the entrepreneurs in the study had generally about life and entrepreneurship. For example, if it is meaningful for an entrepreneur to have freetime and spend it with friends, it helps to interpret the ways the entrepreneur construes freetime to be an important activity or rather a space for the entrepreneur. It also helps to create an understanding of why, for example, growth is not depicted as an important goal in the business. Thus, the life stories allow the study of the part entrepreneurship plays in the lives and the identities of the participants. (See also May 2001, 257) The identity theory that allows for the existence of many identities that may exist in parallel or need to be managed, and the narrative method that is capable of capturing and accepting paradoxes and inconsistencies facilitate and make possible the study of entrepreneurs not as a general, overriding category but as the different identity positions that the individual inhabits. Overall, the theory constructions are multidimensional, shifting focus away from one single approach. Thus, entrepreneurs are constructed of several elements – and not viewed just as risk-taking economic agents - increasing the need to draw research boundaries in a more complex way.

7.2.3 Application of the narrative method for theory

The majority of entrepreneurship studies advocate the importance of the individual actors and for individual acts as the primary agent, as in my

study, but the epistemological view adopted in these studies does not always support this idea (Kovalainen 2000). Epistemological assumptions – what counts as knowledge - in entrepreneurship research have been geared towards fulfilling political needs: the relevance of entrepreneurship research is often normatively assessed on its capability of bringing relevance to practice (Davidsson 2002). For example, the topic selection or assessment criteria are affected by individual and collective values, thus, making visible the way values and ideologies affect social science research that also includes entrepreneurship studies. To work on ‘relevant research’ is equated to answering problems of the current interests of powerful managers, funding institutions and other reputable organisations as well as policy makers. The researchers that fail to meet the needs of ‘relevancy’ and produce studies that diverge from this dominant ideology risk being unacknowledged and pushed into the background. (Ogbor 2000, 612.) From this perspective, therefore, knowledge is something that has a direct utility function: it is knowledge if it increases the number of entrepreneurs in society, and especially of growth-oriented companies, if it helps entrepreneurs or policy-makers to assist entrepreneurs in expanding their companies. This epistemological assumption, together with the normative view, has directed entrepreneurship research in the choice of research topics and perspectives.

Therefore, the field of research in entrepreneurship assumes without questioning that entrepreneurship is good because it has an impact on the economy in terms of growth (Ahl 2002, 160). Researchers have been active in aiming at identifying the characteristics that will lead to the successful growth of the company without considering whether such growth is always the best option for the entrepreneur and the entrepreneur’s family. Research has strived to identify what kind of platforms are necessary for start-ups again trying to provide the necessary knowledge for policy-makers as a result of the assumption that entrepreneurship is always desirable but lacking focus and critical analysis of the role of entrepreneurship in the individuals’ lives. These examples are of course not exhaustive but are presented merely as examples.

As a result, it seems that the field of entrepreneurship research is actively producing and maintaining taken-for-granted assumptions of knowledge that need to be questioned by becoming aware of how the ideology controls our research. (Ogbor 2000, 608.) Entrepreneurship and SME research has relied on myths and mythical concepts that have been reproduced within the field. In their desire to accommodate the policy and practice-oriented needs of increasing the number and growth of SMEs a lot of studies have been generated by using various definitions of

growth companies. The definitions have included companies with 'historical growth, businesses with potential, businesses wishing to grow, businesses facing step change, businesses in a growth pole, businesses in a cluster (associated frequently with technology); businesses with ambition; businesses actively seeking assistance; and businesses trying to export' (Gibb 2000, 19) while too little is known and understood of the theories that the SMEs or their owner-managers have about their own behaviour and the way that stakeholders seek to explain their behaviour (Gibb 2000, 30). The criticism of Gibb (2000) purports that entrepreneurship research has been conducted largely with the aim of providing usable results for the policy arena but these results have only increased the growth of ignorance.

The ideological control in entrepreneurship research has been reinforced by the influence of ideology on methods of inquiry: the types of data researchers seek, the propositions and hypotheses they formulate, the operationalisation of data and the methods of testing validity and causality. In entrepreneurship research, there has been an obsession towards defining entrepreneurship satisfactorily, not in terms of sensible and contextual properties but in numbers, averages and other mathematical notions. This tradition has participated in the cry for more and better statistical and other mathematical models in a pseudo-objective style to explain entrepreneurship. In this attempt the researcher pretends to be neutral, objective and value-free and claims to behave in a purely scientific manner standing above subjectivity and the social context of the research process. The problem with such an approach is considering social events to take place in an historical vacuum. (Ogbor 2000, 622-623.)

With the narrative method in this study, the focus is on the knowledge the participants generate of themselves. The idea relies on the notion that things are not just simply happening to us – there is always an active interpretation and meaning-making process taking place. The entrepreneurs are actively engaged in giving different meanings to their entrepreneurial experiences (see also Rae 2002). In these accounts entrepreneurship is presented in a paradoxical way contesting the simplistic either/or view dominating, for example, studies of success and failure and cherishing the idea that entrepreneurship includes both the pleasure and pain of being in the business (Drakopolou Dodd 2002). The narrative approach allows the investigation of not only the linear, neat processes but also those that are filled with friction, creativity, paradoxes and ambiguity, which may ultimately generate new theories and understanding (Perren – Grant 2002, 202). It is through this ability that narrative research into entrepreneurship can claim to provide a better, richer and more real view of en-

trepreneurship though I refute the idea that narrative research could be the means to render authentic experiences. I understand that no human expression can ever stand for ultimate truth and, therefore, no narrative can ever represent the final statement especially because each of us lives with an infinite number of narratives, stories within stories, any one of which we might share with a researcher or other audiences. Hence, I also suggest the authors of entrepreneurial life stories and biographies written for academic or entertainment purposes should cherish the paradoxes and complexities within the many stories and not aim to produce A Single Story of the Entrepreneur. Furthermore, my story as a researcher is employed to understand the stories of others and my story serves as the basis for comprehending the stories of others, thus, rendering it impossible to provide a glimpse into an authentic experience of an entrepreneur. (Cottle 2002, 537-538.)

Discussion within entrepreneurship theory has focused on stabilising and freezing the concept of an entrepreneur to a standardised clause ‘an entrepreneur is an X that does Y’ that could subsequently be applied in all research settings and on every occasion for deciding who to address with surveys or interviews. The narrative solution to the approach is however that there is a great variety of interpretations of ‘the entrepreneur’ and these understandings also change over time in the eyes of the general public (e.g. Hyrsky 1999) but also on the individual level (Cohen – Musson 2000, 42). Thus, we should not strive to define entrepreneurs in a uniform way but to be aware and capture the definitions applied in the field as definitions that may reflect the changes in values and attitudes towards entrepreneurship as in Finland in the early 1990s or in the individual’s perceptions of what it is to be an entrepreneur.

The temporality and the different identity positions it allows in the life stories is also made visible in these entrepreneurial stories. In this study, the narrators portrayed the protagonist(s) in the stories as foolish, inexperienced, incompetent although the portrait of the narrators today were that of serious, experienced and competent professional entrepreneurs. The transition can be explained through time and the narrative. The narrators distanced themselves from the protagonists that had witnessed those experiences. Their present identities were not threatened by the stories of the protagonists as they were acting in a different time and were not then equipped with the necessary experiences and knowledge. At the same time the understanding of the entrepreneurs of themselves and the act of entrepreneurship is transformed. The identity of the entrepreneur does not remain fixed in the process over the years. The entrepreneurs in the study actively constructed their past based on the knowledge of the

present with a perspective to the future. For example, the knowledge of the available help and support systems of today helps to create the early days of the business as a struggle since the systems were not in place then. However, at the time the entrepreneur may not have understood that they were deprived of these support systems since they exist and are known only today. The story of the lack of support helps to tell the story of the past from today's perspective. In this way, it is also possible to ridicule and make a fool of the past identity as one which is ignorant and makes mistakes, mistakes that serve to demonstrate that learning has taken place and experience accumulated. This helps the narrator occupy the current position of the competent and professional entrepreneur, and therefore helps the narrator to present him- or herself as a good person. At the same time, however, it is also possible to make a fool or downplay a part of one's current identity if one is able to show one excels in another aspect, for example, to be poor at management but good at innovation and technology, which illustrates the paradoxes that are visible in the identity stories.

Studying identity, however, proposes a challenge for the researcher (see also Kurvinen 1999, 330-331). Identity is a social construction, thus, our ways to analyse and understand identity also form a part of the social construction. In the analysis, the narrators are both the subjects and objects of the storytelling and the identity of the researcher is blurred with the identities of the participants. In this study it is especially noticeable in the case of the female entrepreneurs where their experiences and stories push me to reflect on the different themes understanding that some of the experiences form a part of my subjective experiences. The boundary between self and others becomes blurred because I have claimed that the identities are narrated against the others. Since the narrative allows focuses on the interaction between the researcher and the participant I was able in this study to be reflective about my interventions and the way I generate the data as I have already discussed in the methodological discussion. What needs to be discussed further is the way entrepreneurship researchers coming from for example business schools, approach the field and how this affects the results and conclusions derived. In this study, I have demonstrated how I impose my categories on the interviews and invite the participants to talk about particular issues at the expense of others. The extracts presented from those interviews nearly always represent cases where I have been curious about the problems, challenges and risks present in entrepreneurship, thus, it seems that I have understood entrepreneurship to be mainly about assessing risks and addressing problems. This means that I am interpreting the world through the administra-

tive, corporate view of the world versus viewing the world through the lenses of an entrepreneur (Gibb 1999). This raises a general concern about whether this study is able to discover what is relevant for the entrepreneurs, the participants, in this study. Luckily, the participants were not always happy with my categorisations and were able to contest them as is reported. Some refused to talk about the problems and the risks, instead, they engaged in stories of the glories of entrepreneurship and therefore, they were able to demonstrate what is important and what is not from their perspective. I understand this to be the strength of the narrative method. I think, however, that entrepreneurship research might share this problem in general, which is not often taken into consideration due to the different methodologies applied. There are a lot of research papers and reports that are aimed at studying human resource management in SMEs by looking at whether companies have formal job descriptions, human resource plans and appointed human resource managers in place. In the absence of all of the above the conclusion derived is that SMEs lag behind the large companies in terms of human resource management (e.g. Reid et al 2002). The ideal presented is that SMEs should become more like large corporations. In a way our message therefore is that SMEs are not large enterprises, entrepreneurs are different from managers and yet we interpret the world of the entrepreneurs and SMEs through the eyes of a manager in a large corporation. I suggest that researchers become more conscious and reflexive about the ways they structure the world and how these ways shape their data gathering, analysis and interpretation.

In this research, I have discussed how the entrepreneurs in this study made use of different story-formats to tell their entrepreneurial story. The entrepreneurs who had been actively telling their stories to others as a result of their active participation in the entrepreneurs' association or other organisation had developed a crystallised, arch-like story that made use of narrative devices to create an interesting story, i.e. a story with a sufficient amount of difficulties and problems that were overcome and a 'happy ending' was reached, thus, resembling the stories of entrepreneurs told in the media. However, not all produced a similar story, some stories were less consistent, more fragmentary and less conclusive. The entrepreneurs were not quite sure where to start their story and whether they were telling a story I wanted to hear and, thus, they made several requests to me to redirect it. One participant, Timothy, refused to tell a story for the fear of reproducing entrepreneurial life in a story-like format and wanted to make it clear that it is the big picture, the mosaic that counts not the small tiles (the successes or the defeats). Another participant, Samuel, did not tell a personal story but instead gave a story of the gen-

eral laws that form the entrepreneurial story. Therefore, it is possible for entrepreneurs to tell different kinds of stories, liberating them from the myth inherent in entrepreneurial stories – from rags to riches – and to view them, for example, as similar to other career stories.

In those stories that did not conform to the story-telling mode I was expecting (Timothy and Samuel), I persistently and repeatedly provided cues that would help them to tell the story I was interested in. I was not trying to control the content of the stories but I was interested in producing a particular type or format for the entrepreneurial stories. A format consisting of personal experiences, short stories of important events, both negative and positive, that were meaningful in the process either before the start-up or during their entrepreneurial career. I also wanted to know about the thoughts and ideas related to entrepreneurship and stories of influential people for the entrepreneurship and their role in it. After the interview with Samuel I was especially partly sceptical whether I would be able to analyse the thin narrative stripped of personal recollections and experiences and narrated from a general point-of-view (see also May 2001, 255). Upon reflection, however, I noticed that the thinness was only a problem with regard to my expectation that the entrepreneurial stories should be uniform and resemble those narrated in the media. If life-stories are not judged as good or bad but are taken as the starting points for the analysis as the stories the participants can or want to share, then the question of thinness is no longer an issue.

However, continuity and change were inherent in the stories in a way that the entrepreneurs aimed at portraying entrepreneurship as a natural (career) move. In a way this could be seen to be a characteristic of narrative research – the aim of the life story is to create a plot and to integrate the loose ends into the overall story. In this study I have presented eight entrepreneurial life-stories and in these stories my aim was to create a plot that helps to make sense of the entrepreneurial life-story of the entrepreneur. It is in this way I may have contributed to creating meaning for events that actually were not that meaningful or were for example the result of pure chance as was narrated in the stories. In this research I also view the world through a lens that assumes that all experiences can be conveyed by words (Cottle 2002, 544). This seems less so when looking at Timothy's story who throughout the interview insists that entrepreneurship is not a story but is more like a mosaic where the whole is important and it cannot be rendered into a story. This I view to be the weakness or rather a boundary narrative research cannot easily cross: what if our experiences cannot be told in stories? Or we feel the stories give a false picture of the experiences?

The phenomenon under study affects the abilities of individuals to talk about the phenomenon. It could be argued that these entrepreneurial stories were narrated as success stories, firstly, because all of the entrepreneurs were in business at the time of the interview (except Diane who worked as an employee but viewed this as a transition period between entrepreneurialships). She therefore did not hesitate in talking from the entrepreneurial position and secondly, because my Business School background and in an Institute aimed at fostering entrepreneurship invited the entrepreneurs to narrate entrepreneurial stories in a positive light to a receptive audience who views entrepreneurship as an acceptable and admirable endeavour and who would not confront the entrepreneurs on their decisions or life styles. Thus, it could be argued that the stories are different from for example the stories of women made redundant by a bank (Kurvinen 1999) or the long-term unemployed (Kortteinen – Tuomikoski 1998). Although most of the entrepreneurs had experienced some problems or difficult times during their careers, these difficulties were labelled as necessary difficulties, interesting anecdotes in their careers that helped to illustrate the success story. They helped the entrepreneurs narrate coherent stories although some contradictions remained in them. If I had been negative or more sceptical of entrepreneurship I believe the stories would have been less coherent. The coherence was derived from being able to depict the end as a happy one, not contesting the existing position. The past negative experiences, for example, Arthur's bankruptcy, Marge's redundancy and the resistance towards her business Diane faced, however, break the coherence in the stories. It is in these stories that it is important to make sense of and to weave the difficult times into the overall story in order to reach a happy ending. It seemed important for Arthur and Marge to verbalise the difficult times into short, fictional stories where these events were portrayed using very concrete vocabulary and examples and not to describe them using the non-attached vocabulary related to bankruptcies and redundancies.

In narrative studies, it is customary to aim to provide typologies of the genres of stories that were told (Kurvinen 1999, May 2001, Lampela-Kivistö 2000). This follows the many theorists in narrative studies who employ 'comedy', 'romance', 'tragedy' and 'irony' to represent different types of narratives applied in the narrative structures of story-telling in the Western tradition (Murray 1989, 181). However, in this research I have purposefully not aimed for such a typology. I believe that the typologies may provide a fuller understanding of the phenomenon than the uniform category that research has previously dealt with (see for example May 2001) but at the same time they partially contribute to the classifica-

tion of the world through the typologies, for example, contributing to the understanding that all entrepreneurial stories would subsequently fit into the typology. I do not think that the eight stories presented in this research are enough to provide such typologies but more importantly I would highlight the differences and similarities in the meanings created, that contribute to the difficulty of typologising the stories. The typologies might even erase the paradoxes and ambiguities I have aimed at bringing to the forefront in this research. I have already pointed out that the stories of unemployment and redundancy were interpreted and given different meanings in the stories and secondly, I have claimed that all these stories are success stories at the time of the narration since my material does not include ex-entrepreneurs but they are narrated by successful entrepreneurs (although the measures of success vary from one story to another). I believe that the typologies on the one hand may help to create an understanding that stories of entrepreneurship are not different from other stories as they can be analysed through the structures that we apply to tell stories in general. On the other hand these typologies may become self-servicing ends as they can be applied to give a label to all the stories forcing them to represent a particular type. Similarly, aiming to interpret entrepreneurship through one theoretical concept (such as moral order in Katila 2000) will help to investigate the material from that particular perspective and moral order is reproduced in the material. Thus, the themes I have discussed in this research with regard to the stories are not natural in the sense that they are something that I have stumbled onto but it is my theoretical lens and subjective life experiences that form the basis for the analysis guiding the analysis and reading of the text. In this research I have attempted to produce new perspectives in the different stories by constructing them to be both similar and different from each other and by focusing on the internal similarities and differences within the stories as well as the changes in me from one interview to another. In these ways I have tried to avoid freezing the interpretations in order to provide the reader with the possibility of alternative interpretations. Then again, I agree that there are conventions in writing of academic texts, for example, in narrative studies the restorying (Ollerenshaw – Creswell 2002) of the raw material stories contributes to the fixing of meaning and interpretations – the stories are wholes with a beginning and an end and the themes that I construct to be a part of those stories add up and make sense. However, in order to highlight the availability of many interpretations rather than one I have aimed to provide alternative interpretations in my analysis that may help and invite the reader to produce their own.

In this study, I have claimed not to be interested in truth, i.e. I have not focused on investigating whether the stories the entrepreneurs have told are true or not but aimed at interpreting why it is important for entrepreneurs to tell these stories. I have however included some factual items (such as turnover, number of employees, etc.) within the analysis, hence, they could be false, fabricated or wishful thinking, for example, the participants may have exaggerated their turnover. The interest, therefore, in this study has not been in assessing the growth rates of the enterprises but in the way the participants build narrative coherence around these events – how they understand growth in the first place and how growth has changed their entrepreneurship and what kind of challenges it proposes. The interest lies not in the factual items but how they are built into the story of the entrepreneur.

In this research, I have aimed at self-reflection by openly declaring my interests and agendas. In doing so I understand that it is not possible to write ideologically neutral papers or articles but it is necessary for researchers to expose these aspects and not try to mystify, hide or bury these interests in the analysis and claim that the research is neutral. The challenge is to make the reader look at a familiar problem and self-evident truths with fresh eyes, to be self-reflective. The possibility that we have is not to start from preconceived ideas in the name of doing relevant research but to question how and why particular ideological systems, institutions and belief systems produce and shape entrepreneurship in current society and to seek to understand how the prevailing social, historical, political and ideological systems affect entrepreneurship among different societal groups (Ogbor 2000, 627-629) or individuals as in this study.

7.3 Suggestions for the next act

In general, I suggest that future studies in entrepreneurship should aim to produce a richer, multifaceted picture of entrepreneurship (see also May 2001, 279) that requires listening to the stories the entrepreneurs want to tell rather than aiming at fitting entrepreneurs and their stories into pre-existing categories. For example, this could mean investigating how the meanings often depicted in entrepreneurship research change from story to story, thus, assigning different meanings to the crystallised and canonised entrepreneurial values in ways that necessitates understanding of the industry logics and of the personal theories of entrepreneurs. A larger variety of perspectives is needed to study entrepreneurship. Research that

aims to produce relevant research results and portray entrepreneurship merely as a virtue as discussed previously needs to exist in parallel with studies that aim to produce an understanding of how entrepreneurs experience entrepreneurship by bridging the gap between the theorising of entrepreneurship and related policy objectives, by focusing also on the personal experience of entrepreneurship and the relationship between entrepreneurs and society. For example, the increasingly strong focus on enterprise policies on framework conditions does not seem to be the key issue if the problems and challenges with regard to entrepreneurship are interpreted through the personal experiences of existing entrepreneurs in this study.

The social context needs to be born in mind when interpreting studies. For example, the type of welfare society that we have in Finland and in Scandinavian countries contributes to the way entrepreneurship is understood in Finland. Within these societies entrepreneurship is understood to propose a risk of falling outside the welfare system. In countries where the systems are not as broad or do not exist at all the experience regarding the risks involved would be different. I suggest that the context should be made visible in research studies carried out in order to make it easier to interpret the studies in the different contexts.

Through these suggestions I believe it would also be possible to discard the view that successful entrepreneurs are only those who are able to create long-term entrepreneurship and expand their companies, thus, for example, understanding entrepreneurship in the context of new career thinking consisting of several phases of which entrepreneurship might be only one among other phases. Hence, the measures of success are negotiated in the individual stories allowing active meaning-making processes and increasing our understanding of the social phenomenon called entrepreneurship.

In this study, I have looked at individual entrepreneurs and their stories of entrepreneurship. However, in quite a few of the stories there were significant people, business partners, involved in the process and their role was highlighted in the stories of the individual entrepreneurs. The image of the entrepreneurial process (venture) may be impartial when viewed only from the individual perspective. It would be interesting to study how the founding team constructs the entrepreneurial decision; what kind of meaning is given to the support of others in the decision-making process, how the stories of the many differ and are similar to the stories of the one where the one has had primary responsibility for decision-making regarding the entrepreneurship. In addition, the role of others could also be investigated from the perspective of families involved

in the process supporting and/or resisting the process; or to analyse the ways entrepreneurs are constructed in the support services or bureaucratic arenas. I believe that the narrative method and theory has much to offer in all of these potential research questions. In addition, the role of narratives may also be important in educating future and existing entrepreneurs as it provides tools for making visible some of the existing assumptions or arguments and taken-for-granted truths that the entrepreneurs themselves share. They can help the participant to critically assess these assumptions, and actively create new meanings – for example, to explore and question the meaning of the 24 hour constraint on personal entrepreneurial life (Gold et al 2002).

In addition, in this study I have described how I assign the participants with a particular identity in my quest for the entrepreneurial story. I invite them to narrate their stories from that particular position, of an entrepreneur. In the stories then the entrepreneurial, I-position is the most dominant one although other aspects of identity are also touched upon to different degrees. I am able to demonstrate that the entrepreneurial identity may not always be the dominant one, for example, the professional identity may override the entrepreneurial one (a person is foremost a journalist and secondly an entrepreneur). It would be tempting to analyse stories of entrepreneurs that are told or written as general individual life-stories, not having a specific entrepreneurial life-story in mind in order to analyse and understand how entrepreneurship is built into the overall life-story of the person (see May 2001). These stories might be located from the life story writing competitions where any individual is invited to write his or her story. Thus, I invite studies of entrepreneurial identity not to assume that entrepreneurship is the basis for the identity of an entrepreneur. The studies might also focus on entrepreneurs operating in particular strong professions (for example, medical doctors) that I excluded from this study in order to better understand the way these different professional identities coexist and are managed (see also Llewellyn 2001).

With regard to gender I have discussed it primarily in connection to the family, thus, assuming that there is a connection between family and gender. However, I suggest that the role of gender studies in entrepreneurship should aim for more. For example, albeit welcoming the increasing research of female entrepreneurship there is a need to also focus on male entrepreneurs and masculinities. Through these attempts we might understand the role of gender with regard to male entrepreneurs. This would mean that there is research not only on female entrepreneurs, on minority entrepreneurs and on disabled entrepreneurs but also on white, male entrepreneurs as a distinctive category (and not only under

the general non-gendered, non-racial category of entrepreneurs) in order to enable real exchange and communication between men and women practicing in the field, or between the core and marginal groups of entrepreneurs in a more general sense. (Harju et al 2002.)

As a researcher coming from a Business School background, I feel that I am partially restricted by my analytic lens and by being a researcher, not an entrepreneur. I would, therefore, also welcome autobiographies that have emerged in other social sciences to find their place in entrepreneurship research in order to develop the autobiographic genre, i.e. stories written about the relationship of the self, other and culture. This could mean stories written by entrepreneurs themselves (practitioners turning into academics) or by academics engaging in entrepreneurial ventures and writing of the experiences in order to render an understanding of what happens at the deep emotional level with regard to making and taking the entrepreneurial decision and engaging in the endeavour (Ellis – Boechner 2000, Ellis – Berger 2002, Boechner – Ellis 2002). It is through these stories that feelings and experiences could be mediated to the readers, for example to other entrepreneurs or those pondering about the alternative, enabling them to feel and experience the experiences. Autobiographical studies of entrepreneurship might open up new ways of seeing and understanding entrepreneurship.

In this research, I have applied one set of lenses (narrative theory and method) in order to understand the meaning of entrepreneurship in the lives of the participants. However, I have not aimed at advocating narrative research as the only solution for conducting intelligible research and at dismissing all the other methodologies or paradigms as futile ones. Rather, I suggest the need to build bridges between different methodologies in order to build a greater reflexivity of the opportunities and challenges with each methodological choice (Hall J. R. 1999, 259). I mean that those who essentialise the world as a text and criticise the modernist attempts of searching for objective truth, fall into the binary position and prioritise their view of the world over the other, thus making it difficult to engage in a meaningful communication between the two (Hall J. R. 1999, 15). Therefore, I suggest that in the future we might employ multi-paradigm lenses to explore entrepreneurship, for example, by looking at one set of data and material through different paradigmatic lenses to provide understanding of the way the paradigms need not operate at the extremes but may overlap which might foster greater relevance in terms of exploration of pluralism and paradox inherent in entrepreneurship and encourage greater reflexivity in research (Lewis – Kelemen 2002, 264-268).

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APPENDIX 1: A LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANTS PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW

Dear XX,

My warmest thanks of your acceptance to participate in the research interview linked with my dissertation project. The interview material will be the corner stone of my thesis. Therefore, your participation in my project is of utmost importance!

I will interview the entrepreneurs from different industries and from different entrepreneurial phases who have accepted to participate in this study from one to three times. The theoretical framework for my study consists of identity research and the research method is based on the entrepreneurs' narration and storytelling. The thesis will be finalised during the year 2003. The practical aim of the research is to convey a picture of the everyday life of different entrepreneurs and, hence, to aim at broadening perhaps the partially narrow and one-dimensional view of the general public what it is to be working as an entrepreneur.

Before the interview I would ask you to think about a few things:

- the *events* or *situations* that have come to be meaningful for your current entrepreneurship before starting up or during the years of existence
- the *persons* that you feel that have influenced or contributed in some way to your entrepreneurship
- the *difficulties* or *times of joy* that are linked with your being an entrepreneur

In addition, I would like you to remember and perhaps put on a piece of paper when the important events or phases have taken place. If you wish you can also write down some other notes on a piece of paper. However, these pre-hand actions are not a requirement for participating in the interview so that if you do not have time to prepare for the interview, it does not become a threshold for conducting a successful interview. The aim of the interview discussion is to follow the natural route it will take, i.e. I do not have pre-prepared questions for the interview.

I will be pleased to answer any of the questions you may have regarding the interview or the research.

Best regards,

Ulla Hytti