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Social Constructionism:
And Why it Should Feature in Entrepreneurship Theory
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CORE-2007-01
February 2007
Abstract

In this paper a case is made for using social constructionist approaches in entrepreneurship studies. It is argued that this may result in some very important new insights that might not have been generated using traditional analytic and functionalistic approaches. Firstly, summaries of some of the different social constructionisms are given with a view to how they might be suitable for entrepreneurship studies. Special attention will be given to discourse analysis and deconstruction. Secondly, two preliminary studies using discourse analysis and deconstruction are presented.

Keywords: Social constructionism; entrepreneurship; discourse analysis; deconstruction.
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1. Introduction

This paper is meant as an introduction to and discussion of social constructionism combined with some reflections on how and why this approach might be useful in entrepreneurship theory. Social constructionism has emerged as one of the most important paradigms in social science. It has been widely applied in psychology, sociology and humanistic sciences. It has also increasingly been used in organisation theory but has yet to really break into the entrepreneurship field, as the next section will show.

The basic argument of the paper is twofold: Firstly, it is argued that certain understandings of social constructionism are more useful than others. Often social constructionism is associated with a denial of the existence of a physical reality. Although this is in some sense true, this is not the best way to understand social constructionism. As it will be argued in section 3 it is better to focus on the constructive force of language and see social constructionism as an analytical strategy which urges us to question our basic assumptions and what we take for granted. These issues are discussed in the first parts of the paper.

Secondly, it is argued that social constructionism has a place in entrepreneurship theory building. Based on an investigation of two particular streams of social constructionism, foucauldian discourse analysis and deconstruction, it is argued that a social constructionist perspective will enable us to understand and illuminate some hitherto less investigated elements of the entrepreneurial process and not least the process of researching entrepreneurship. In the final section of the paper two preliminary examples of this are given.

The paper proceeds with a short presentation of some of the attempts that have been made at applying a social constructionist approach in entrepreneurship theory. This presentation does not pretend to include all such attempts, but will give some examples of what has been done so far. Following this section the paper outlines the basic issues in entrepreneurship. Three different answers to the question ‘what is social constructionism’ are presented and discussed:

- Social constructionism argues that reality is socially constructed
- Social constructionism focuses on the constructive force of language
- Social constructionism is a strategy of analysis

Although the three questions are all appropriate and complement each other, the paper, as stated above, suggests that the first answer is problematic as the focus on the question of the ontological status of reality leads us away from what is really important in social constructionism, namely to question how we have come to know what we know and question what we take for granted. This is also why social constructionism can contribute in entrepreneurship theory: It can help us generate new and hopefully useful knowledge about entrepreneurship which the dominant perspectives have failed to deliver.

Following this discussion of overall issues in social constructionism a more thorough although far from complete presentation of two distinct streams of social constructionist thought is given. Foucauldian discourse analysis and deconstruction are presented in sections 4 and 5 with a view to how they might be applied in entrepreneurship theory.
Foucauldian discourse analysis has been heavily influential in some parts of social science and focuses on the insight that language plays a crucial role for not only the perception but also for the formation of our social world. To Foucault language produces existence and the world views on which individuals act, are discursively constructed. Discourse analysis proceeds by identifying regularities in the way we talk about things and demonstrates the contingency of these ways of talking.

Deconstruction originates in the writings of Jacques Derrida and incorporates an attack on western metaphysics. Metaphysics has thoroughly infected language and thought, and imprinted the ideas of absolute truth in science and other spheres of life. Deconstruction is a way of tearing down the ‘taken for granteds’ and opening up for hitherto suppressed perspectives. The approach incorporates close readings of texts in order to ferret out contradictions, metaphors, symbols and narratives.

In order to further illustrate the usefulness of the two distinct streams of thought they will be applied in a very preliminary manner to seminal texts in the field of entrepreneurship, namely Schumpeter’s classic ‘The Theory of Economic Development’ (1961) and Shane and Venkataraman’s recent but highly influential article ‘The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research’ (2000). It is regrettable that both the examples analyse scientific texts and that not at least one of them analyses a different kind of data, such as interviews, observations or something similar. However, the author has yet to generate data of this kind on the subject. But some of the most important points are covered in the examples. A brief review of entrepreneurship articles applying a social constructionist approach reveals that the same applies to these articles (see section 2). Important aspects are discussed, but other kinds of data than written texts are conspicuous by their absence.

Before concluding this introduction, a small reservation must be made. Presenting foucauldian discourse analysis and deconstruction as social constructionist approaches is not completely uncontroversial. They could just as easily have been presented as poststructuralist approaches. Esmark et al. (2005) argue that poststructuralism and social constructionism, despite the many similarities, are two distinct traditions. This paper, however, follows the anglo-american understanding of the relation between the two traditions as represented by Burr (2003) in her highly influential introduction to social constructionism. Here poststructuralism is seen as one of the social constructionisms, and in fact almost all of the examples that she gives of actual social constructionist research projects are discourse analytical.

2. Social constructionism in extant entrepreneurship theory

Social constructionist studies of entrepreneurship are few and far between. Overall, the field is characterised by a massive use of quantitative and functionalistic methodologies and a firm grounding in positivist and realist views of reality (Grant and Perren, 2002, Stevenson, 1990). Quite a few authors have argued that the field would benefit from more qualitative research focusing on the less tangible in depth issues in play in the everyday life of entrepreneurs (Gartner and Birley, 2002).

It has also been argued that the understanding of entrepreneurs needs to move beyond the classical understanding of entrepreneurs as risk taking ‘heroes’ that make decisions on economic basis only, and instead take the socio-cultural as well as emotional elements into
account (Ulhøi and Elfring, 2003). But the call for more qualitative research has yet to be translated into social constructionist or constructivist studies on larger scale. In the following section I will, however, review some of the few that I have found (Downing, 2005, Bruyat and Julien, 2001, Chell, 2000, Nicholson and Anderson, 2005, Ahl, 2006).

Bruyat and Julien (2001) take a constructivist standpoint in arguing that the entrepreneur must be viewed as a construction that only exists within scientific projects. They thus reject any essentialism or reification of the entrepreneur as a research object. Reification of the entrepreneur will and has lead to endless squabbles (Bruyat & Julien 2001). This puts emphasis on the importance of definitions of ‘entrepreneur’. Disagreements about what an entrepreneur is are really power struggles within the scientific community (Bruyat & Julien 2001). The article is a rich and interesting attempt at a delimitation of the entrepreneurship field and the preliminary reservations on theoretical issues are appropriate. The constructivist issue seems to be limited to the question of the status of scientific definitions and not extended to the social world as the text is packed with references to what is actually going on in the entrepreneurial reality, framed in a realist language.

Downing (Downing, 2005) on the other hand develops a theoretical framework based on the notion that reality is shaped by social interaction. The overall purpose of Downing’s article is to present a unified theory of social order that can incorporate and explain the many diverse elements in entrepreneurship studies hitherto unconnected in theory, such as social capital/networks, social embeddedness, business models, entrepreneurial personal theory and so on (Downing 2005). All of these elements can best be seen as “products of entrepreneurs’ and stakeholders’ narrative and dramatic interactions” (Downing 2005, 197). Reality thus becomes a reflection of a dramatic enactment of roles in communicative interaction (Downing 2005). This idea is based on Berger and Luckmann’s famous idea of how social structures and institutions come about and (falsely) come to be seen as reified objective facts in an external reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1996).

Downing’s elaborate theoretical framework focuses on the idea that humans tend to make sense of their lives by turning it into stories or narratives of different sorts. Downing furthermore argues that actors read plots into the stories. This changes chronology into causality (Downing 2005). Structuring the narrative sets it into context and gives the storylines a logical progression and maybe also coherence with other significant narratives that the individual produces and reproduces.

For Downing entrepreneurship becomes a social construction just like everything else. The processes of venture creation and development must be investigated as dramatic interactions between the entrepreneur and the stakeholders who may or may not successfully agree on narratives, which structure their understanding of the situation and themselves and shape their actions. The full value of an article such as Downing’s will probably not reveal itself before the elaborate theoretical framework is put to work on empirical data. Only then will it be seen how fruitful such an approach actually is. Although this paper focuses less on the narrative perspectives offered by social constructionism and more on the discursive and power-related possibilities, I believe there is every reason to be optimistic about the empirical results a theory like this could yield.

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Chell (2000) also attempts to generate a research agenda based on social constructionist ideas. She focuses among other things on how the entrepreneur and the venture are co-produced (Chell 2000), and that it is therefore pointless to look only at the entrepreneur and not also on the venture and the social context in which the entrepreneurial process unfolds. An idea shared by entrepreneurship researchers also outside social constructionism (Shane & Venkataraman 2000).

Still others have argued that the meaning attached to the concept of entrepreneurship is very important (Ahl 2006; Nicholson & Anderson 2005). They implicitly argue that the way we talk about ‘entrepreneurs’ has significant implications for entrepreneurial practice.

Nicholson and Anderson (2005) study metaphors used in articles on entrepreneurs in a newspaper in 1989 and 2000. Evoking the idea of words as performative they focus on how metaphors partially structure our daily lives and the way we act (Nicholson & Anderson 2005). The study shows that since 1989 there has been a significant increase in the interest in entrepreneurs. But this increase has also been accompanied by some changes in the metaphors applied to entrepreneurs. Overall, two strands can be identified (Nicholson & Anderson 2005): The mythological strand using magical, aggressive, giant and religious imagery, presenting the entrepreneur as a king, magician, hero and giant. This strand was the only one identified in the 1989 articles. It had, however, in 2000 been supplemented with a ‘rational undercurrent’ presenting the entrepreneur as human, fallible creating misfortune and problems (Nicholson & Anderson 2005). It is worth noting that all else aside the entrepreneur and the entrepreneurial myth is decidedly male (Nicholson & Anderson 2005). The authors view the metaphors in a classic social constructionist form, as social constructions made to assist in making sense of the phenomenon at hand (Nicholson & Anderson 2005).

Ahl’s (2006) brilliant work on how female entrepreneurs are constructed in research texts is another example of the assumption that language is performative. She identifies ten discursive practices, which despite good intentions all amount to basically the same thing: Depicting women as the ‘other’ to real entrepreneurship, casting women as dysfunctional or less adept entrepreneurs (Ahl 2006). She suggests a new research agenda based on social constructionist or poststructuralist assumptions. Studies should thus focus on how female entrepreneurs ‘do gender’ as well as how social orders are gendered (Ahl 2006). This research agenda is very similar to the one implicitly proposed in this paper, except for its ‘narrow’ focus on gender.

All of the abovementioned articles provide interesting perspectives on entrepreneurship and social constructionism. The articles include an abundance of good arguments why social constructionism should feature in entrepreneurship theory. However, with the exception of the last two, they all lack empirical data. The full value of applying social constructionist approaches in the entrepreneurship field will not be apparent until it is applied to empirical data. And it would certainly be interesting to go beyond texts (research papers, newspaper texts or policy documents) to interviews, observational data and other qualitative data sources.

Directly applying social constructionism is, however, not the only way in which questions are posed, regarding the ontological status of the world, and epistemological issues of how we come to know what we know in the entrepreneurship field. Recently, the discussion on opportunities as the potential particular domain of entrepreneurship has emerged (Shane & Venkataraman 2000) and this has resulted in a further discussion of whether opportunities exist as objective entities in the world or are constructed in a dynamic social process.
Unfortunately, it is not possible to discuss this further in this context, but it demonstrates how issues, related to the construction versus discovery distinction, introduce questions into entrepreneurship research that immediately invite epistemological discussions.

3. What is social constructionism?

The question ‘what is social constructionism?’ can be answered in many different ways dependent on the focus of the question. In this section three different answers to the question will be presented and discussed. It is believed that together they describe reasonably well what social constructionism is all about, although the first answer should be treated with some reservation, as will be explained later.

3.1 Reality is socially constructed

The first answer is that social constructionism basically argues that reality is decisively shaped or formed by our perception of it (Rasborg, 2004). This approach is based on the idea that it is impossible for humans to go beyond their sensory perceptions and reach the world as it may or may not exist independently of human thought and action. All contact with an outside world is mediated by a kind of sensory experience; tactile, visual, audible, palatable or odorous. These are, however, only sensations and we cannot be sure they represent the physical reality adequately or even that there is an independent reality beyond the sensory experiences. This notion is proposed by philosophers such as Berkeley, Hume and Kant. In its most radical form this viewpoint states that there are only ideas. The physical world is an illusion. A more moderate viewpoint is taken by Kant who differentiates between the thing as it appears for us and the thing as it exists in itself. We can know the thing as it appears to us, but not necessarily as it is in itself. Social constructionism is thus very sceptical about the existence of a real world, but first and foremost as it is presented in traditional positivistic and empiricist science; namely as that which ensures the stability of our existence, as the reference to our concepts and theories, and as that which determines the truth value of our expressions. Positivist and empiricist science basically tries to assign characteristics to things, e.g. by assigning causal relationships to the natural world or probabilities to the social world. But, argues social constructionism, how can we assign characteristics to a world we cannot even know exists?

This has serious implications for the concept of truth. Traditionally, the truth value of statements derives from their accordance with some external fact, to which it purports to refer. This is referred to as the correspondence theory of truth. But if we cannot access the external facts, how then sort the false from the true statements? Social constructionism instead proposes a kind of coherence theory of truth, where the truth value stems from the statements’ coherence with already accepted statements. Truth becomes a concept that is internal and relative to our discourses. It is the relations with other statements that determine if the statement is assigned the status of ‘truth’. But this cannot be absolute truth. In social constructionism truth is relative and situated. Knowledge is produced in social processes and any legitimacy and truth of statements derives from the social processes in which they are created and subsequently brought into play in.

Many of the arguments made against social constructionism are based on the common sense intuition that surely things are not affected by the way we talk about them. If I decided to start calling houses by a different name, it would not mean that they would stop being houses.
Another example is that saying that you have won the lottery, unfortunately, is not the same as actually winning the lottery (Hughes & Starrock 1997, quoted in Robson, 2003). This objection at best misunderstands what social constructionism is saying. What the particular individual thinks is not really the point. The real question should be: If you think that you have won the lottery, everybody else thinks it, and your lottery ticket fulfills the criteria constructed to identify or select winning lottery tickets, have you then won the lottery? Obviously, the answer is yes. Even death can be shown to be a kind of construction, as the concept falls apart under closer scrutiny (Edwards et al., 1995). Resuscitation, different criteria of death and even rebirth all demonstrate the vagueness of even the most bottom line concept of all (Edwards et al., 1995).

But then how can we be sure that what we know today is still the case tomorrow. How can we be sure that the sun will rise, that the world is stable and predictable? The basic notion of social constructionism is probably that we cannot and should not be sure of this. Our understanding and perception of our world is in fact constantly changing, but not at a pace that makes it a problem in our daily lives. Our discourses are characterized by a great deal of ductility. The fact of the matter is that there is no external world that you can measure against. Not that there does not exist something outside our discourses, but we simply cannot perceive it nor talk meaningfully about it. Edwards et al. (1995) sum it all up quite nicely:

“*Reality can only ever be reality-as-known, and therefore, however counter-intuitive it may seem, produced by, not prior to, inquiry. For what counts as reality is, for any particular item, at least potentially a matter of consensus and disputation (p. 39).”*

The answer to the question of what social constructionism is, sketched above, has a number of difficulties. Firstly, it immediately invites the distinction between reality and our perception of it, and therefore states its basic argument in what could be called realist language. Social constructionism, thus, must argue that we either cannot speak meaningfully of reality or that it does not exist. But the problem is that social constructionism is so much more than this, and focusing on this particular aspect could mean that we end up in pointless discussions of the ‘real world’. Social constructionism is not about denying the existence of an external world. Rather, it simply argues that our knowledge of the world is socially constructed and cannot be seen as a representation of this world. The main implication of this is that research should focus less on attributing characteristics to the social and natural world, and more on studying how we have come to know what we know. It is also worth remembering that most social constructionists actually explicitly do not deny the existence of an independent external reality, but rather choose one of two strategies: One is to accept its existence but say we cannot know or talk about it (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987). The other is to bracket it (Burr 2003). That is: The external world is not needed to do research in the social sciences (and perhaps the natural sciences as well), rather it makes it more difficult. We must therefore simply not take it into account. By bracketing the real world we may generate new and interesting aspects of our constructed world and our knowledge.

It would therefore seem that focusing on the scepticism towards an external reality does not yield the best definition of social constructionism, and we need to look elsewhere.
3.2 The constructive force of language

Burr (2003) suggests that the focus on the importance of language is a defining characteristic of social constructionism. As implied by the abovementioned, language is not simply a reflection of an independent reality. It does not in its structure and content reveal the structure and content of the real world. On the other hand it is also not a reflection or manifestation of the subject that utters the language (Foucault, 2005). Burr argues that this brings social constructionists to disregard the traditional notion of language as mainly if not entirely descriptive. Language is not a more or less precise description of neither our thoughts nor reality. Speaking and writing is action. It is doing something, creating something. Here social constructionism draws on the theory of speech act and ethnomethodology (Burr 2003).

As the traditional question of truth is abandoned and language becomes performative rather than descriptive, it also becomes crucial to our social being how we talk about things. Speaking and writing can produce knowledge and truth, which in turn can effect the actions, perceptions and values of individuals and groups significantly. The concepts associated with ‘entrepreneurs’ are absolutely crucial to the status and value attached to being an entrepreneur, and this can greatly affect who decides to become entrepreneurs and why.

The questions of language/discourse and power thus becomes intimately linked (Burr 2003). Foucault implicitly rejects the view that power is the ability to make somebody do something even if it is against their will (Burr, 2003, Foucault, 1998). Presenting and gaining acceptance of a particular way of speaking about things (discourse) is exercising power. The issue of discourse and power will be elaborated later.

3.3 Social constructionism as a strategy of analysis

Finally, on this non-complete list of possible answers to the question of what social constructionism is, one could state that social constructionism is basically about questioning the basic values and constitutive character of what we are investigating (Andersen, 1999). Social constructionism thus becomes less a question of an attitude towards the ontological status of reality and our knowledge of it, and more a certain attitude in our examination of knowledge and changes in society. The key questions thus become: How have we come to know what we know and what are the effects of this particular knowing? The process therefore changes from the perception of things/social entities to the perception of perceptions (Andersen 1999). This has been referred to as a division between an ontological approach and an epistemological approach. The aforementioned is basically about assigning characteristics to objects while the latter ‘dispenses with things’ (Foucault, 2005) in order to investigate how the objects of knowledge are brought into play (Andersen, 1999). The purpose of the research being conducted in the two approaches is also different. While ontological research seeks to describe the real state of things, and thereby achieve a kind of closure on a particular matter or area of knowledge in the great accumulation of knowledge, epistemological research seeks to criticise already existing knowledge in order to open for new ways of seeing things, new perspectives within the same area (Schmidt, 1983, Andersen, 1999).

In the previous sections I have attempted to present some of the defining characteristics of social constructionism. It was furthermore argued that focusing on the constructive force of language and social constructionism as a strategy of analysis, is better than the focusing on the potential non-existence of an independent physical reality. The latter doesn’t adequately
capture what social constructionism is trying to do, and will end up in endless metaphysical discussions.

It has also been hinted that the real value of social constructionism in the entrepreneurship field depends on it being applied in actual research. In trying to come one step closer to this, I will in the following go into more depth with two different versions of social constructionism with a view to how they might be applied in entrepreneurship research. The two versions are discourse analysis in its foucauldian version, and deconstruction.

4. Discourse analysis

It is probably wrong to speak of discourse analysis in the singular, as it covers a wide variety of analytical approaches and tools (Taylor, 2001). Going from genealogical analysis (Foucault, 1983), which focuses on the discontinuities in general fields of knowledge over time, to conversation analysis working intimately and detailed with small fragments of discursive interaction between speakers (Taylor 2001). Taylor (2001) suggests an overall definition of discourse analysis as “the close study of language in use” (p. 5). This definition seems quite reasonable given that one does not take ‘in use’ too literally. It should not be understood as entailing that the researcher must be standing closely by as words are being spoken or written. Instead is must be understood as a study of actual language and not the structural properties of language, which is the domain of linguistics and grammatics.

But within the broad field opened by Taylor’s (2001) definition, a great number of differences exist. Taylor’s list includes language as a topic or resource, investigation of the content or process of language use and etic and emic analytical approaches. I will briefly discuss a few others I find relevant.

Burr (2003) distinguishes between macro and micro social constructionist analysis, a distinction that is relevant to discourse analysis as well. Discourse can thus be analysed on different levels. Wetherell (1998) terms the same difference as molecular versus molar analysis. The first kind typically being ethnomethodological analysis or conversation analysis, and the latter being foucauldian discourse analysis and other poststructuralist approaches. She, furthermore, states that while the latter is often highly critical the first is not.

As an example positioning theory as presented by Davies and Harré (1990) focuses on the positions made available to or forced on people in their actual conversations, while the foucauldian version of the position concept focuses on the positions being made available to certain groups of people within a discursive field; e.g. the positions of doctor and patient which are made available to people with a medical degree and sick people, respectively within the field of medicine. Davies and Harré thus propose a micro level analysis while Foucault is on the macro level.

This distinction is closely related to the question of the possibility of the subject as Davies and Harré construct their theory in order to salvage individual agency from its destruction at the hands of poststructuralists such as Foucault. Micro analysis of discourse lends itself more to

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2This presentation rests almost exclusively on what could be called the foucauldian version of discourse analysis, and which is presented primarily in “The Archaeology of Knowledge” (Foucault 2005). Furthermore, it relies greatly on Andersen’s (1999) interpretation of Foucault’s ideas.
the possibility of incorporating an active subject. In positioning theory the subject can to a
great extent actively accept or reject the positions being offered in the interaction. Wetherell
(1998) concurs with this and tries to demonstrate how close analysis of talk-in-interaction
reveals how actors generate a great number of possible subject positions and that these are
highly contextual or indexical in nature.

4.1 Foucauldian discourse analysis

Foucauldian discourse analysis flows from the insight that language plays a crucial role for
not only the perception but also for the formation of our social world. To understand the
social world, its objects and actors one must look at the way language forms and determines
things and subjects. The basic question is thus not what characteristics the objects and
subjects in the social world have, but rather what rules govern the formation of these objects
and subjects?

According to Foucault (2005) discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of
which they speak” (p. 54). Burr (2003) supplements: “Discourses, through what is said,
written or otherwise represented, serve to construct the phenomena of our world for us, and
different discourses construct these things in different ways” (p. 65). These definitions capture
well that discourses produce effects; they produce world views, which people act on.
Diverging from Foucault’s original outline, especially as it comes out in the earlier works
such as ‘The Order of Things’ (2001), later discourse analysts have argued that many
competing discourses can be in play at the same time, even concerning the same topic
(Jørgensen and Phillips, 1999, Korsgaard and Neergaard, 2007). Discourses can co-exist and
people in different discourses will act differently if the discourses construct different realities.

The basic element of a discourse, at least in its foucauldian form, is the statement (Foucault
2005). Discourse analysis thus concerns itself with the analysis of statements and not least the
relation between groups of statements. Foucault goes through great pains to describe what a
statement is not and what does not constitute a statement as opposed to e.g. sentences and
speech acts. This demarcation is important to avoid misunderstandings.

A statement is not a sentence characterised and defined by its grammatical or linguistic
elements. This means that what the discourse analyst is looking for is neither the linguistic nor
the grammatical properties of the statement. Although statements in a certain sense are
language, language and statements exist on two different levels. Language is a system for the
construction of grammatically correct sentences. Though it is derived from actual statements,
language does not have the actual reality of statements (Foucault 2005). It is hereby also
implicit that statements can go beyond mere words.

Neither do statements acquire their character by reference to some outer reality that may
determine the truth-value of the statement. The statement ‘the entrepreneur of the year in
Denmark started her business in 2004’ does not refer to some fact or thing in an independent
reality. This obviously entails a denial of any kind of correspondence theory. Things have no
pre-discursive existence. Things are constituted by the discourses. It furthermore means that
discourse analysis rejects the idea of discourses as a meeting point or broker between
language and an independent reality.

The final demarcation refers to the suggestion that the character of statements could be that
they serve as more or less adequate representations of the intention of subjects, and that the
The task of the discourse analyst therefore becomes to decipher the real meaning behind the statements. Foucault obviously also rejects this idea. In fact, discourse analysis is very sceptic about the idea of a subject as a homogeneous unit. Statements are understood to be events in their own right and the intentions and motives of the person producing the statements are disregarded. Instead subjects are understood to be discursively created. It is not subjects that produce discourse but rather that subjects are created by discourse. Subjects are a certain kind of objects created by language. This does not mean that we cannot speak of subjects and assign actions to them. But they are not more ‘real’ than any other kind of discursive construction.

The statement must be seen as an event in its own right. It must not be seen as a manifestation of something other than itself. The special character of statements stems from the fact that they are basically functions of existence. They are events that through enunciation produce existence (Andersen 1999). The statements themselves form the things and relations they ‘are about’. Entrepreneurs as individuals and as concepts are brought into existence by the statements on entrepreneurs. In ‘The Archaeology of Knowledge’ Foucault in some places presents these issues in a way that suggests that we need to understand this quite literally. Both in the sense that this way of speaking of the emergence of existence is not a metaphorical one, and in the sense that there is no pre-discursive existence. In other contexts Foucault seems a bit more moderate and does speak of “extra-discursive practice” (Foucault 2005, 75), which suggests that there may indeed be some kind of extra-discursive existence. The famous phrase of Foucault (2005) which argues that we must “dispense with things” (p. 52) can thus be interpreted as either meaning that in a research context it is purposeful to ignore or bracket the external reality, or that it does not exist, so why bother with illusions?

The construction of objects through statements is the first of four elements in the foucauldian discourse analysis. The remaining three are: The formation of subject position (enunciative functions), the formation of concepts and discursive strategies. These remaining elements will be presented in the following sections.

Statements also produce positions that subjects can take, and which allows or prohibits the subject from making certain statements (Andersen 1999). Discourses allow certain persons to say certain things, this permission may give the persons a great deal of prestige, and by being in this position the persons’ utterances are given legitimacy. This entails the grouping of persons in the discourse. The discourse on entrepreneurship groups people into entrepreneurs, employees, customers, partners, advisers etc. These groups are both restricted and derive a certain status, positive or negative, from being in a particular group. The groupings also embody a form of hierarchy and define the distribution of assets and power to groups and individuals. The asymmetry between client and social worker within the social service discourse provides a good example of this.

The individual statements are events in their own right, but cannot stand alone. They always refer back to earlier statements as well as forward to future statements. As to the first point, a statement can only be, if it is part of a field of associations constituted by all the statements that the aforementioned statement relates to (Andersen 1999). Concepts are used and formed in statements and when a statement includes a concept, it reproduces or modifies the concept that was produced by other, earlier statements. An effect of this is that statements open a field (as well as close other potential fields) for future statements.
Regularities in a group of statements result in a more or less systematic permission and exclusion of particular groups of statements (Foucault 2005). It is strategic choices that determine which of the possible groups of statements within a discourse are actualised and which are not. When, for instance, statements concerning spiritual self-development or gender are uneasily presented in the entrepreneurship discourse, it is the result of strategic choices within the discourse. Choice in this sense should be understood more as the actualization of some possibilities rather than other, than as something that follows from deliberate action.

A final observation on Foucault's discourse analysis is that when the researcher looks for the regularities in the dispersion of statements, she is not looking for some underlying structure with a more real existence of which the statement is simply a manifestation (Foucault 2005). This rejection of structure, essence, origin or any other kind of underlying reality that can ensure the unity and coherence of the disorderly presence of apparently diverse and heterogeneous statements is the key in discourse analysis. Any regularity demonstrated by the researcher is a construction and can never be exhausting. The description of the statements and discourses can never be complete, and the grouping of statements will always also be a construction on the part of the analyst.

But is entrepreneurship as such a discourse? Is there; or rather can we construct a convincing regularity between statements on entrepreneurship? This is an interesting question. The scientific study of entrepreneurship is a rather new one, characterised by confusion as to what the basic concepts and theoretical elements and methodologies should be. The field draws heavily and sometimes too uncritically on other fields such as business administration, organisational theory, management theory and so on. It would thus seem that the field is in a state of becoming. We must therefore not expect to find a solid paradigm dominating the field. But we can find some regularities. It is my guess, as I shall not venture further into this question that there is significant regularity and that this regularity, although it has ample room for contradictions and disagreements, has consequences for the entrepreneurs that are worth exploring.

On the basis of the abovementioned a number of interesting questions come to mind in regards to entrepreneurship that could well be addressed by a discourse analytic approach:

- How does the entrepreneurship discourse constitute its objects (entrepreneur, new firm)?
- What positions does the discourse allow for whom?
- What kinds of discursive strategies are in play in entrepreneurship discourse?
- What relation does the discourse have to other discourses? (Entrepreneurship discourse stands in certain relations to other discourses, a relation that could have been otherwise (Foucault 2005). There is a relation of similarity or identity with business/economics while there is a relation of difference with e.g. personal development and family life or work/life balance).
5. Deconstruction

Explaining deconstruction is no easy task. Derrida and his fellow deconstructionists have been accused of deliberate obscurity, and maybe rightfully so (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). But the fact remains that the project of criticising western science and metaphysics from within while using a language entirely infected by metaphysic ideas and concepts must necessarily be difficult to carry out and difficult to communicate. But this is nonetheless (one aspect of) what Derrida is trying to do. He launches a devastating attack on western metaphysics in various forms (metaphysics, western science, logocentrism are used almost interchangeably in ‘De la Grammatologie’ (Derrida, 1970)). This attack on metaphysics is a good starting point for the presentation of deconstruction. In ‘De la Grammatologie’ Derrida tries to demonstrate how logocentrism has infected our way of thinking, with some unfortunate consequences.

Logocentrism is basically the idea that there is some privileged language or rationality of which everything else is an imperfect derivation or representation (Derrida, 1970). This is communicated, for instance, in the idea of an original language uttered by God and inscribed in the world and Man. In this original language ultimate truth resides and one must seek this truth (Derrida 1970). This entails a devaluation of written language in relation to the spoken words. The spoken word is closer to the soul and therefore closer to the original logos (reality, truth, rationality, God’s language), whereas the written word is a representation of the spoken word. This is related to what Derrida calls the ‘metaphysics of presence’, which argues that being is presence (Derrida, 1970, Derrida, 2001). In the spoken word the speaking subject as well as that which is signified is somehow immediately present. This is not the case with the written word which is a perversion of (true) language. In the spoken word the subject and the world are immediately given. The traditional distinction and distance between the signifier and the signified is also embedded in this metaphysics along with all the traditional dichotomies of western thought: Nature|culture, body|soul, man|machine, universal|particular and so forth.

Derrida argues that language does not refer to something other than itself. Words do not obtain their meaning through a relation with ‘real’ things. This is stated in clear opposition to metaphysics. Words become meaningful through difference. In simple terms, the meaning of ‘entrepreneur’ does not emanate from entities in the ‘real’ world that are essentially ‘entrepreneurial’ but from its being different from ‘employee’, ‘wage earner’, ‘manager’ and so on. Words and language have meaning because of a play of differences. This follows the structuralist insight, as presented by Saussure that signs are arbitrary (Derrida 1970). That is: The nature and special characteristics of a sign or word can tell us nothing of the thing it purports to represent. But Derrida and other poststructuralists go further and claim that language as a structure is unstable (Burr 2003). Meanings shift constantly as new differences come into play and others disappear. It therefore follows naturally that in language there can be neither truth nor existence in any absolute sense (Derrida, 1976).

Logocentrism is therefore in desperate need of a critique that examines all that is taken for granted. A more critical stance must be taken in regard to the heritage of western metaphysics that lure not only in philosophy and the human sciences, but everywhere that language is used. For the metaphysical misunderstandings are inherent in the language. The structure of a
typical sentence displays this metaphysical non-neutrality of language: A sentence has a subject, an object and a verb. A subject does something to something. ‘Entrepreneurs create businesses’. This sentence postulates the existence of both active subjects and actual entities, and furthermore pretends to be about something outside itself. The words seem to take the place of the thing, which is temporarily absent (Derrida 1970). But the absence is permanent. Language will never be able to tell us anything about anything other than itself. A metaphysics of presence is undermined by the fact that the absence is permanent.

Instead of logocentric metaphysics Derrida tries to present what might be called an epistemology (as opposed to a metaphysics) which bases itself on the concepts of différance, play and trace. The concept of différance is an attempt to convey something that escapes the metaphysical scheme, and is presented as something without being or essence, something unmentionable, a game/play that produces words and names that come in the form of a trace (Derrida 1970). A trace being something is somehow prior (although not in a temporal sense) to the written or spoken sign. This, of course, becomes rather obscure. And it must necessarily be so. No critique of metaphysics can be stated outside of metaphysics as the latter has infested our language completely. Deconstruction is thus a critical stance which seeks to disrupt all the ‘taken-for-granted’ of a field from within that field.

The really interesting question in this context is: What can we do with deconstruction? The answer comes from seeing what Derrida actually does in his writings. In ‘De la grammatologie’ Derrida shows how an arch-writing prior to both speech and writing is a necessary condition for the existence of writing and speech (Derrida 1970). This is done through a careful and close reading of Saussure. In the reading Derrida searches out apories, contradictions, metaphors, symbols and narratives that are present in the text. The effect of this reading is a dissolution of the difference between writing and speech as they both emanate from the arch-writing. This demonstrates the arbitrariness of differences. Furthermore, it is an inversion of the traditional hierarchy in the dichotomy ‘writing | speech’, where speech was considered the superior part. As both writing and speech come from an arch-writing, writing in a way becomes the superior part (Bøggild et al., 2004). This is basically what deconstruction is about: Careful examination of the ‘taken for granteds’ that lie in the metaphors, puzzles and narratives of texts.

In seeking origins, essences and identity metaphysics violently suppresses difference and conflict. It seeks closure and totality in the form of absolute knowledge, the ultimate political system (democratic capitalism) and so on. Derrida’s epistemology of difference naturally must oppose this. The political dimension of deconstruction prescribes a continued critical investigation and revision of concepts and assumptions in all dimensions of social life. The important thing is to not dream of and pursue closure. In the entrepreneurship field this would translate into a continued critical examination of the assumptions underlying our definitions and understandings of entrepreneurship, and an openness towards alternative ways of being entrepreneur. Instead of enforcing sameness and homogeneity we must defend individuality and difference (Rendtorff, 1999). And accept that conflict is a fundamental and constitutive aspect of social life.

Derrida quite explicitly rejects that deconstruction is a method, theory, analysis or critique (Derrida, 1986). This will not prevent me from trying to extract some methodological propositions that could constitute a framework for the deconstructive reading of entrepreneurship:
• A close, careful and critical reading of entrepreneurship texts.

• With a view to deconstructing the violent and oppressive elements and effects of the texts. This means a reversal and displacement of the conceptual hierarchies in the texts.

• A rejection of any kind of closure and universality in the findings and complete openness to alternative forms of entrepreneurship; a continued re-negotiation of the category ‘entrepreneurship’ and its associated categories such as ‘growth’, ‘new business’ and ‘development’.

6. Applying social constructionism in entrepreneurship research

In the following sections a highly preliminary application of discourse analysis and deconstruction will be attempted in order to clarify why I believe social constructionism should be applied in the entrepreneurship field.

6.1 Discourse analysis of the traditional definition of entrepreneurship

In this section a preliminary discourse analysis of the traditional definition of entrepreneurship will be attempted. Starting from Joseph Schumpeter’s (1961) classic definition of entrepreneurship in ‘The Theory of Economic Development’ key elements of entrepreneurship, as they present themselves in Schumpeter’s text, will be critically examined. This will hopefully demonstrate the potential of using such a discourse analysis in entrepreneurship studies.

Schumpeter distinguishes between two different kinds of change and growth: On the one hand the incremental which does not produce new phenomena and therefore can not be called real change. This is a stabile economic system in balance and uninterrupted by radical changes. Schumpeter calls it the circular flow. On the other hand is the discontinuous change that creates new phenomena and actual development. This last kind is brought about by individuals that can make new combinations of existing resources. The individual as such is constructed in the text as an agent who consciously and wilfully innovates. The entrepreneur, thus, becomes the key figure in economic development.

The discursive construction of the entrepreneur as object and concept

The entrepreneur is discursively constructed in Schumpeter’s text through a series of similarities and differences to other concepts. The similarities include: Authority, will power, initiative, leadership, dynamic, spontaneous change, mental freedom and rarity. The differences include: Routine, mere management, static, equilibrium, connection and tradition.

The entrepreneur is further characterised by having a particular psychological set up, which represents a break from the more unreflected and routine-based life in the ordinary and stabile organisation. The entrepreneur is thus motivated by:

"...the dream and the will to found a private kingdom, usually, though not necessarily, also a dynasty. The modern world really does not know any such..."

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3 Similarity can in this context best be understood as a different kind of difference, a lesser difference.
positions, but what may be attained by industrial or commercial success is still the nearest approach to medieval lordship possible to modern man.” (Schumpeter 1961: 93).

“...the will to conquer: the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others, to succeed for the sake, not of the fruits of success, but for success itself.” (Schumpeter 1961: 93)

“...the joy of creating, of getting things done, or simply exercising one’s energy and ingenuity.” (Schumpeter 1961: 93)

This means, among other things that the entrepreneur will typically continue working on his or her project far beyond the equilibrium of expected utility and the cost of the efforts (Schumpeter 1961).

Another important element in Schumpeter’s discursive formation of the entrepreneur is an informative narrative on overcoming, which is brought into play to demonstrate the challenges that entrepreneurs face:

"As this first point lies in the task, so the second lies in the psyche of the businessman himself. It is not only objectively more difficult to do something new than what is familiar and tested by experience, but the individual feels reluctance to do it and would so even if the objective difficulties did not exist,” (Schumpeter 1961: 86)

The entrepreneur must thus overcome the objective practical problems related to the execution of a new combination. Instead of following old paths s/he must tread new paths. Furthermore, the entrepreneur must also overcome him- or herself. Schumpeter believes that man has an inherent reluctance to doing new things. A reluctance that is unrelated to the objective difficulties of the project, and it would be there even if the difficulties were non-existent. Therefore, it requires an effort of will to overcome this inherent reluctance.

"The third point consists in the reaction of the social environment against one who wishes to do something new. This reaction may manifest itself first of all in the existence of legal or political impediments. But neglecting this, any deviating conduct by a member of a social group is condemned, though in greatly varying degrees according as the social group is used to such conduct or not.” (Schumpeter 1961: 86-87)

Finally, there is also resistance to new combinations in the social environment which the entrepreneur must overcome. The social environment responds badly to new combinations. This is manifest in political and legal barriers, in the resistance from competitors, and in the problems in finding suitable collaborators, as they are most comfortable with the existing.

These three basic challenges represent an overall theme of overcoming and achieving freedom. Through overcoming the three elements the entrepreneur can realize his or her kingdom with complete control and authority.
**The construction of subject positions**

Basically, two overall subject positions are formed in Schumpeter’s text: That of the entrepreneur and that of the non-entrepreneur, the latter submerged in the circular flow. Although Schumpeter denies any glorification of the entrepreneur, and indeed do describe some deficiencies on the part of the entrepreneur (lack of social skills) (Schumpeter 1961), there is no mistaking: The position of the entrepreneur is significantly more attractive than its counterpart. This becomes evident if we look at the alternative. The non-entrepreneurial existence is submerged in limited routines closely tied to and limited by traditions and locked patterns of behaviour. The entrepreneur on the other hand is the free agent realizing his or her own desires and ideas, and in doing that s/he drives the entire economy forward.

**Discursive strategies in entrepreneurship**

At least two strategic lines can be identified in Schumpeter’s entrepreneurship discourse: Dominance and transcendence. These two lines allow us to discuss some of the interesting elements of the strategic exclusions and inclusions of statements in the entrepreneurship discourse.

The dominance-line manifests itself in Schumpeter’s choice of words for describing entrepreneurial practice. An entrepreneur can conquer new resources, gain control over means of production and eliminate old combinations as he defeats his competitors. Dominance, thus, covers both the control over already annexed resources as well as the conquest of new; an aggressive and continuing struggle to expand control over the kingdom both in depth (control) and width (conquest).

The transcendence-line manifests itself in a number of places in the text. Here, two of these will be discussed: 1) The opposition between the circular flow and entrepreneurial activity, and 2) the narrative of overcoming.

The circular flow incorporates traditions, routines and rules of conduct, while entrepreneurial activity on the other hand incorporates just the opposite; break from tradition, innovation and freedom. The daily workings in the circular flow thus become an un-free kingdom of necessity, while entrepreneurial activity becomes an escape or overcoming of un-freedom. The entrepreneur is uninhibited by tradition and connection to the social, to habits, and so forth. He is an autonomous individual that becomes free through a break with the social.

The narrative on overcoming describes this break in further detail. It can be read as a manual for transcendence. If one can free oneself from the objective difficulties of the project, the resistance from the surrounding environment, and the inhibitions internalised in one self, it is possible to transcend the mundane world and grow free.

This interpretation of Schumpeter, focussing on the very radical break between the circular flow where individuals are ‘determined’ by routines and structures on the one hand, and the entrepreneurial role with its strong individual agency and freedom on the other, has been questioned by Goss (2005). He argues that the entrepreneurial self-centeredness is not a psychological ‘essential’ but properties of the social processes. There is some reason in this point, as Schumpeter argues that individuals shift in and out of the entrepreneurial role, and the characteristics of an entrepreneur can therefore not be stable psychological traits, as stated by trait-theories of entrepreneurship (McClelland, 1987). Yet, as Goss admits, the radical distinction between the circular flow with its undercurrents of structuralism and the individual centred entrepreneurial role is a defining element of Schumpeter’s text. Goss tries to reconcile
this by recasting free choice and free will as social processes, rather than “an individual’s ability to make unconstrained choices” (Goss, 2005: 207). I would argue that this revisionist reading of Schumpeter’s text violates it, by glossing over an actual paradox in the text. The language used in the text and the admiration of the entrepreneur so clear in the text constructs the entrepreneur as (the only) truly free individual, unconstrained by social processes. How the interaction between the circular flow and the free entrepreneurial activity works, is, in my opinion, an unresolved paradox in the text.

Although Schumpeter’s text is originally from 1911 and the description of the entrepreneur sometimes seems a bit old-fashioned, several of the elements are still in play today. The entrepreneur as a hero who on his own overcomes obstacles is still alive today, despite the fact that some current research demonstrates that entrepreneurship is a social process (Ulhoi and Elfring, 2003). Furthermore the idea that (good) entrepreneurs want fast and high growth has been canonised and operationalized in many entrepreneurship studies. This idea is so widely recognised that entrepreneurial success is typically understood as solely economic growth through increase in number of employees, turnover, profit, etc.

Final remarks
What might we do with such a discourse analysis? First of all it reveals some of the basic assumptions and values inherent in the traditional social science view of entrepreneurship, insofar as Schumpeter can be taken as an exemplary of this view (Swedberg, 2000, Ahl, 2007). This allows us to question these assumptions and values. What about entrepreneurs for whom control, independence and growth might not be so important? If entrepreneurship policy is built on theories that fail to represent this latter group, surely they will not receive the assistance that could make the difference between survival and failure.

6.2 A deconstructive reading of entrepreneurship research

Deconstructing opportunity
As many have indeed pointed out, the entrepreneurship field is characterised by a lack of consensus on fundamental concepts and purpose (Davidsson et al., 2001). There is a great variety of definitions of the concept of entrepreneurship as well as understandings of how and why entrepreneurship should be studied and how the field relates to other fields.

One of the best and most accepted bids to end this confusion is the idea put forward by Shane and Venkataraman (2000) that entrepreneurship is basically about the identification and exploitation of opportunities. In their often cited article ‘The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research’ this idea is explored and some theoretical guidelines to future research are given. The overall objective of the article is stated as an enhancement of the field’s legitimacy in order to prevent it from being marginalized in the scientific community at large (Shane & Venkataraman 2000). Entrepreneurship research must make itself useful, by explaining and predicting empirical phenomena not already explained by other fields.

According to Shane and Venkataraman too much research has been focusing exclusively on the entrepreneur as an individual, which will not secure a unique theoretical framework. Instead entrepreneurship must be seen as a nexus of objectively existing opportunities and individuals able to identify, evaluate and exploit the opportunities. Studying the individuals is therefore never enough; the opportunities must also be studied.
The article by Shane and Venkataraman (2000) can be seen as basically a cry for more focused and better theory. The definition of better being that it can explain and predict empirical phenomena not covered by other scientific fields. Good theory thus carves out a niche for the researchers. As stated above the individual-perspective is already covered by strategic management research, so it needs to be combined with a study of objective opportunities, in order for entrepreneurship research to constitute a unique field.

This approach is based on the age old distinction between theory and practice. Entrepreneurship theory must better explain and predict (control?) entrepreneurship practice. Traditionally, theory has been valued over practice, as theory is closer to the contemplative life-form praised by philosophers since before Plato. Theory transcends the dirty degrading and laborious mundane existence and arrives at the pure abstract true world of ideas. Theory dominates practice by knowing it and using this knowledge to form entrepreneurship practice (Foucault 1998).

The article thus implicitly postulates and reproduces a distinction between theorizing on and practicing entrepreneurship, but the article in fact enacts to undermine this distinction. The article basically describes a possible entrepreneurial act: What the article proposes the entrepreneurship field should do is exploit the opportunity identified by the authors; to perform the entrepreneurial act.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arch-entrepreneurship</th>
<th>Entrepreneurship theorising (Entrepreneurship')</th>
<th>Entrepreneurship-business (Entrepreneurship&quot;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify opportunity</td>
<td>Identify unique theoretical framework</td>
<td>Identify business opportunity (possibility of selling at a premium / mend market failure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate opportunity</td>
<td>Does it cover empirical phenomena not covered by other research fields?</td>
<td>Evaluate if the business idea is viable (e.g. market research)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploit opportunity</td>
<td>Do research based on the theoretical framework</td>
<td>Exploit the business idea (e.g. start a new venture)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The process described/prescribed by Shane and Venkataraman is thus structurally similar to the entrepreneurial process in a business setting. This hints at an arch-entrepreneurial practice preceding entrepreneurial acts in both entrepreneurship practice (entrepreneurship") and entrepreneurship theorizing (entrepreneurship') (see section 5).

Entrepreneurship' is thus an embodiment of arch-entrepreneurship just as entrepreneurship" is. Entrepreneurship' and entrepreneurship" are one and the same. On the first hand Shane and Venkataraman’s text seems to be firmly rooted in a modernistic and positivistic paradigm which aims to produce universally true theories of empirical phenomena exhaustingly given in experience. A paradigm that in certain senses give primacy to theory, as theory abstracts from empirical evidence the essential features to present representations of greater value than the chaotic and confusing contextual events.
Yet as argued above, theorizing on and practicing entrepreneurship is one and the same; instantiations of an arch-entrepreneurship of which entrepreneurship seems to be the inferior case. That is: To find the best and most fully elaborated instance of arch-entrepreneurship one must go to entrepreneurship.

A paradox
There is a paradox in this. Shane and Venkataraman state that entrepreneurship is a transitory phenomenon, while the same is certainly not meant to be the case for entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is always on the verge on collapsing into management (Stevenson and Jarillo, 1990) and must therefore constantly renew itself by seeking new ways, new opportunities. The same should not apply for entrepreneurship according to Shane and Venkataraman. The time is right for entrepreneurship to settle on an opportunity and exploit it; carve its field and pursue a specific theoretical framework, and therefore become a kind of management. Entrepreneurship practice and entrepreneurship practice will hence only meet in the short interval of time where entrepreneurship is truly entrepreneurial, namely in Shane and Venkataraman’s article. All that follows (if it happens in accordance with Shane and Venkataraman’s suggestions) will collapse into management. One might argue that Shane and Venkataraman propose a closure of the entrepreneurship field, while maintaining the constant transitory and changing character of entrepreneurship. How might this come out? If one argues that theories by knowing practice control it, this would lead to a fixation of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship would be less entrepreneurial and more managerial in that it would seize to discover new opportunities and simply exploit the extant opportunities. Following Schumpeterian logic this would lead to economic stagnation (Schumpeter, 1961). If one does not prescribe to this foucauldian notion of power-knowledge, the result would simply be the continued separation of theory and practice or entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship. As entrepreneurship continually changes and follows new opportunities, entrepreneurship falls behind exploiting the extant theoretical framework. This will surely mean an increasingly less adequate description and prediction of empirical phenomena.

On the basis of this one could suggest that entrepreneurship research must be ever open to new perspectives and reject closure to one specific theoretical framework. Keeping up with the empirical phenomena, or keep the two practices related, entrepreneurship must be as flexible and changing as entrepreneurship. This paradox in the article by Shane and Venkataraman thus incorporates a poststructuralist agenda which rejects the image of grand theory and instead urges social science to accept the fact that it does not inhabit a world apart from the empirical phenomena it purports to study. Social science is also a practice like any other and must demonstrate its legitimacy by constantly pursuing new and interesting perspectives, never ceasing to critically question itself and other practices.

The deconstructive reading of ‘The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research’ thus comes out completely different. The promise of entrepreneurship as a field can only be fulfilled if the field remains open to a number of different and changing ways of seeing entrepreneurship. If this is not done the result might be that entrepreneurship research carves its niche in the scientific milieu but at the expense of loosing touch with entrepreneurial practice in the business world.

Final remarks
Although the deconstructive reading of Shane and Venkataraman comes across a bit farfetched, it hopefully demonstrates the deconstructive method. It was attempted to show how even entrepreneurship research is rooted in traditional western metaphysic tradition, and
that we need to question the underlying assumptions of this research. Hopefully, it is also clear that there is a paradox in the text of research always trying to seek closure and finality, while theorising on a constantly changing field such as entrepreneurship.

Hopefully, the above examples of a discourse analysis and deconstructive reading have demonstrated how one might go about doing social constructionist analysis and how it might produce knowledge that is different from what would be produced using other approaches.

7. Qualifications and reservations

A number of reservations must be made when doing social constructionist research. Traditional social science and natural science have been built on the idea that scientific knowledge can be objective, valid and generalizable/reliable. In social constructionist research all these core concepts must be either abandoned or reinterpreted. In its very nature social constructionism is a rejection of the idea of an external independent world that we may measure our scientific ideas against, to see whether they are true or not. This idea forms the basis of the traditional values of traditional science mentioned above.

Firstly, the idea of generalizability or reliability (that the results are decontextualised and can be reproduced exactly) must simply be abandoned. All knowledge is constructed and has a unique story of origin which ties it to a specific social context and severely limits its generalizability. It may be said that everything is local and nothing is universal (Kvale, 1995), or that all knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1999). As a researcher doing social constructionist research one should always be very aware what conclusions are drawn on the basis of the data and analysis. Typically, there are severe limitations to what can be said.

Secondly, feminist scholarship has battled the traditional concept of objectivity, namely the idea that there can be knowledge untarnished by subjective elements such as time/space/social origin, values and emotions (Haraway, 1999, Harding, 1992, Korsgaard, 2005). Instead they argue that knowledge is always situated and constructed in a particular unique social process, which will influence the content of the knowledge (Haraway, 1999, Harding, 1992, Korsgaard, 2003). Furthermore, they argue that this is not a liability to social science, but can be an asset. Harding (1992) proposes a new and stronger concept of objectivity based on political/ethical virtues rather than illusions of neutrality. The virtues put forward by Harding (1992) are fairness, honesty and the ability to detach oneself from your own standpoint, which will allow you to view other’s ideas more openly. The basic idea is that a better science can be built if we accept that no universal truth and no objective standards are possible; such will always be the reflection of dominant (male) values. Instead, we must import preliminary and renegotiable standards that can create a more open and pluralistic scientific practice.

Thirdly, Kvale (1995) has discussed the validity concept as applied in social science, modelled on the natural sciences. Again arguing that a correspondence theory of truth is untenable, the consequence is that the question of validity must be reframed in a form that does not aim at securing correspondence between research results and how things really are, what the people involved really mean and whether the research results really reflect a more general state of affairs. Instead, Kvale (1995) proposes validity criteria focusing on the actual dynamic practice of scientific inquiry relating to 1) the craftsmanship of the researcher who tests the quality of the knowledge production process, 2) communicative processes, where validity is attained by continually discussing conflicting knowledge claims in dialogue in the
scientific community or with the subjects of the studies, 3) pragmatic consequences of the knowledge, where knowledge is ‘made true’ (Kvale 1995) by translating it into action. Does it work? Can this knowledge help us attain the given goals?

So even though generalizability must be more or less given up, at least in its traditional form, both objectivity and validity can be reinterpreted into new and hopefully better forms that can aid researchers in creating valuable knowledge using social constructionist approaches. The brief discussion is by no means exhaustive but hopefully makes it clear that such reinterpretations may be possible and desirable.
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ISBN 9788778822048

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