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## The emergence of entrepreneurship in organizations: joint decision-making about new sales practices in management group meeting interaction

**Abstract:** This study examines the emergence of entrepreneurship in organizations. The material consists of the audio-recorded meetings of management group members in one Finnish firm specialized in management services. The analysis illustrates how the members jointly negotiated new entrepreneurial sales practices in their meeting interaction but failed to demonstrate commitment to their future application. The findings conceptualize the emergence of entrepreneurship as a collaborative, four-stage decision-making process based on shared understandings of entrepreneurial ideals. They further suggest that this process is contingent on the agreement and commitment of organizational members to whom the responsibility to apply entrepreneurial practices in their daily work is assigned.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, organizational practices, meeting interaction, joint decision-making, case study.

**JEL codes:** L21, L26, L29.

### Introduction

In today's increasingly competitive business environments, entrepreneurial attitudes and actions are claimed to be paramount for firms of all sizes to prosper and survive [e.g. Kuratko 2009]. In organizational contexts, the main task of entrepreneurship is to improve economic performance [Rauch et al. 2009] and to rejuvenate strategies and operations [Ireland, Covin & Kuratko 2009]. However, despite the heavy emphasis on the need for firms to behave entrepreneurially, there are

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surprisingly few empirical studies on the processes of how organizations *become* entrepreneurial [see, however, Peltola 2012]. For instance, the concept of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) that defines the entrepreneurial behavior of organizations [Covin & Slevin 1991] regards entrepreneurial actions and their outcomes as already accomplished facts by utilizing archival performance data and assessments of past activities when measuring the hypothetical entrepreneurial behavior of firms [Covin & Slevin 1989; Rauch et al. 2009]. On a similar note, the theoretical models of corporate entrepreneurship (CE) define important antecedents and elements of entrepreneurship [e.g. Ireland, Covin & Kuratko 2009], but fail to explain how entrepreneurial practices *emerge* in the everyday reality of organizations. As Steyaert [2007; 1997] argues, scholars have thus far largely omitted to explain the entrepreneurial processes of emergence within organizations and how they are enacted in social interaction. The present study aims to contribute to this underexplored topic.

Change is an essential element of entrepreneurial processes [Steyaert 2007]. Change occurs when habitual practices of doing are transformed into new ones after practical experience has shown that the current ones no longer serve the organization. Change processes typically take place in interaction situations, such as meetings, where participants bring outdated practices to the center of attention and negotiate how they should be reformulated.

In organizational life, meetings are, in fact, the very situations in which firms produce and reproduce themselves, where firm activities are created and maintained, and where divergent issues meet and potentially merge [Boden 1994; Drew & Heritage, 1992]. Meetings can therefore be considered central places where entrepreneurship can also emerge in social interaction, and where attempts aim to renew and maintain it as an interactional joint achievement of the meeting participants [see Asmuß & Svennevig 2009]. For example, regarding the development of the concept of EO, Miller [2011] suggests that meetings could be particularly informative in offering new insights into how directors discuss their entrepreneurial activities.

The purpose of this study is to explain in detail the discourse in which new entrepreneurial sales practices are negotiated in the meeting interaction of one Finnish case firm's management group. The interaction discourse described here is obviously but one possible version of what can be understood and meant by entrepreneurship. In fact, entrepreneurship as defined in theoretical literature, entrepreneurship operationalized as a particular type of competitive behavior of organizations, and entrepreneurship constructed in different occasions and circumstances represent various versions of entrepreneurship that may overlap or differ. The fact that there is no absolute or objective meaning of entrepreneurship does not prevent scholars from discussing entrepreneurship as a socially and discursively constructed phenomenon.

## 1. Joint decision-making as an interactional achievement

The present analysis takes advantage of established interaction structures of joint decision-making, proposals and complaints that conversation analysis has already laid out. Applying conversation-analytical tools to fine-grained analyses of discourse in this manner is common in discursive psychology [Billig 1999].

In interaction situations, *joint decision-making* normally begins with descriptions and assessments of the present situation, and then progresses to creating a solution for a different, better future [Huisman 2001]. Decision-making sequences typically entail discussing and deciding about more or less distant future activities, proposing appropriate solutions to identified problems, as well as building a joint commitment to them [Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012; Gunnarsson 2006].

The depiction of present situations may take the form of *complaints*. Complaints express discontent about a state of affairs for which someone is responsible [Heinemann & Traverso 2009]. Thus, they are inherently negative [Edwards 2005]. Attributing responsibility to a person or an organization renders complaining potentially problematic. Therefore, speakers tend not to engage in complaining without sufficient grounds and may not even label their action as complaining, but as criticizing or reporting facts instead [Edwards 2005]. In addition, interaction participants can completely refrain from affiliating with the complainant or joining the complaining activity. This is because, by demonstrating affiliation with one participant, a speaker necessarily disaffiliates with another and potentially harms this relationship [Heinemann & Traverso 2009].

Stevanovic [2012] conceptualizes joint decision-making by a hierarchical four-stage process: 1) proposal, 2) access, 3) agreement and 4) commitment. The process typically begins with a proposal that becomes established as a joint decision when participants have a shared understanding of the content of the proposal (i.e., access to common knowledge on which the proposal is grounded), agree with the proposer's opinion, and demonstrate commitment to the suggested future action. The hierarchical nature of the decision-making process allows participants to also bypass the stages of access and agreement. In those cases, the decision-making sequence results in a non-decision.

Joint decision-making sequences indeed often end without the participants reaching a decision or the process can continue in forthcoming interaction situations [Huisman 2001]. Proposals may hence not only win approval as such or with qualifications and modifications, but also be rejected either overtly or implicitly. Participants have several techniques to steer the discussion towards a non-decision without becoming accountable for doing that [Stevanovic 2012; Houtkoop 1987]. They can, for example, postpone their responses by asking further information at the access stage. On the other hand, if agreement is wanting, the pro-

poser may also try to pursue more adequate responses from the other participants [Pomerantz 1984b].

*Proposals* invite recipients to perform some action in the future and to comply with the proposed action [Houtkoop 1987]. Proposals can take different forms, such as requests, offers, invitations and suggestions [Houtkoop-Steenstra 1990]. Participants can elaborate the proposals further by offering subsequent versions [Davidsson 1984] of them. In joint decision-making, every proposal inherently implicates that there is a decision to be made and that this decision is contingent upon participants' commitment [Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012]. In other words, proposals indicate that the decision should be reached together instead of proposers imposing their views on the other participants [Stevanovic 2012]. Therefore, in order to guarantee a genuinely joint decision, the task of moving the discussion towards a decision rests on the recipients and not on the proposer. Even though this may lead to the abandonment of the proposal, the proposer typically takes this risk to avoid forcing unilateral decisions on others.

Joint decision-making further evokes two specific authority-related issues about the proposed future action: who is authorized to define and determine this action, and who should then perform it [Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012]. Decision-making sequences that start with a proposal place participants in a symmetrical position from which to agree or disagree on and to commit to the suggested future action. In comparison to decision announcements, proposals encourage positive assessment without undermining individual participants' authority to freely evaluate the proposal. Commitment must, however, be separated from the actual performance of the desired action [Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012]. They are often two different issues, as a mere display of commitment can take place in interactive situations regardless of what happens afterwards.

## **2. The case firm**

The case firm offers consultative business management services to other organizations. This study addresses the management group (i.e. the managing director and five other directors) of this small privately-owned Finnish enterprise. Besides serving in their capacity as executive directors, the management group members were also intensely involved in their firm's daily activities as salespersons. They thus played an interesting dual role, as they were responsible for both the firm's overall strategy as well as how this strategy was implemented on a practical level within the organization.

The material comprises the meeting talk of the case firm's managing group. Altogether five consecutive management group meetings in the normal weekly

meeting sequence line were audio-recorded in January and February 2008, thus constituting a total of approximately 12 hours 40 min. of talk. The meetings were conducted in Finnish and recorded for later transcription (see Appendix 1) and translation with the prior permission of all the members. One of the management group members recorded the meetings. The longest meeting lasted 4.5 hours and was attended by all six members, whereas three to six members attended the other four meetings. The members are identified by the codes A, B, C, D, E and F. The analysis is based on the verbal meeting interaction of the participants.

The typical meeting conversation can be characterized as informal, argumentative and rapid. One indicator of rapidness was the fact that several talk sequences contained many utterance fragments and very few pauses. Because the chairperson did not allocate turns, there was plenty of turn-taking competition and overlapping talk, especially in meetings in which all members were present.

### **3. Joint decision-making about entrepreneurial practices for selling**

The ideal of entrepreneurship was relevant to the case firm as an officially stated key aspect of its strategic goals. In the fourth recorded meeting, the managing director explicated that the firm's culture should emphasize *entrepreneurship* and that one of the strategic elements on an individual level was an *entrepreneur attitude*. At that point, the managing director offered no further explanations as to the specific content, purpose or target of entrepreneurship.

During the analysis, it became evident that the entrepreneurial ideals were linked to solving problems the firm had encountered in selling. The most pressing problem was the need to do something to boost sales. To this practical end, the members negotiated three proposals of new practices to be applied in their future sales activities. The first two proposals *initiate* a new interaction activity, whereas the third is a *response* to a prior turn. At the end of each subsection, the three practices are linked to the theoretical concepts of entrepreneurship.

#### ***3.1. Presenting a proposal to anticipate client needs***

The first new sales practice concerns a proposal to anticipate client needs as a part of the case firm's general sales culture. The style and tone of the conversation in this sequence was humorous and cheerful. The sequence took place towards the end of the fourth meeting. Immediately before the extract, the members had consulted the agenda to check what issues they still needed to cover, after which member B initiated a new topic:

**Extract 1 (Meeting 4, 2:05:42–2:06:51, three members present)**

**Extract 1–1 PREPARATION**

01 B: hey this is in my opinion (.) this is well a thought that  
02 I was actually thinking about (.) I even thoug- even thought that way  
03 that this would be more like a sales director (.) issue

**Extract 1–2 PROPOSAL**

04 but (.) should one even more create such a culture that it is even  
05 a bit (1.5) it is even a bit EMBarrassing that a client contacts us  
06 C: mm  
07 B: because in that case (.) in that case we have not been [early enough  
08 C: [we have not (]  
09 B: there on the move  
10 C: yeah  
11 B: in a way at that point when a client contacts us  
12 we are already too late  
13 E: mm

In the first section (Preparation, lines 1–3) of the sequence, member B begins by noting that a proposal that follows falls to the official domain of someone else (a ‘sales director’). The careful formulations (e.g. ‘this is well a thought’) can be heard as attending to potential problems that could arise from the fact the proposal lies outside B’s own scope of responsibility.

In the second section (Proposal, lines 4–13), B presents the essence of the proposal. Member B suggests that the firm should feel embarrassed if their clients are the first to contact them, rather than the other way around. B formulates the proposal, here as well as throughout the entire sequence, with a mixture of cautious conditional forms and softeners [‘a bit’, ‘in a way’; see Edwards 2000] and more direct forms of talk [e.g. emphasized not]. These formulations appear to help maintain good working relationships with colleagues, but at the same time, render the actual proposal explicit and unambiguous. C agrees with B’s idea by partly overlapping talk and repetition of B’s exact wordings. B continues with an extra clarification that receives only minimal token acknowledgement from E (line 13). Member B seems to interpret it as insufficient because, thereafter, B begins to pursue a more adequate response from E by offering a subsequent version of the proposal:

**Extract 1–3 PROPOSAL REFORMULATION/ASSESSMENT**

14 B: you know the (.) the need has already existed there so long that  
15 that (.) that in a way like (.) in a sales culture  
16 C: mm mm  
17 B: it should be just like  
18 C: that (.) that is quite I think  
19 B: [those cases should always be so that  
20 C: [a good (.) good point  
21 E: but  
22 B: that you would be we would be the first to contact  
23 E: hey

In the third section (Proposal reformulation/Assessment, lines 14–23), member B specifies why exactly they should be the first to contact their clients and thus offers the other participants a better access to the justification for the proposal. From a sales point of view, one should ‘always’ (extreme case formulation; Pomerantz 1986) be the first to understand what one’s clients need and the first to inform them of these identified needs. The firm should prevent the accumulation of client needs on the client’s side such that the client would feel compelled to contact the firm first. Rather, the firm should anticipate the client’s needs before anyone else. After assessing B’s viewpoint as ‘good’, member C reformulates the proposal:

#### Extract 1–4 AGREEMENT THROUGH ASSESSMENT

24 C: the mi- mindset  
 25 B: it would be like  
 26 C: fhas to be exactly like thatf  
 27 B: yeah  
 28 C: fthat one knows before the cl(h)ientf  
 29 E: but

#### Extract 1–5 ASSESSMENT OF PRESENT STATE

30 B: these these (.) well cases that come via telephone  
 31 E: but  
 32 B: are more like  
 33 C: heh  
 34 B: well that (.) well (.) #well it is good that money is coming in# (.)  
 35 but [fdamn itf  
 36 C: [heh heh heh heh  
 37 E: but well actually this has (.) this has been the tendency  
 38 C: freceiving ordersf

In the fourth section (Agreement through assessment, lines 24–29), member C agrees with B’s idea by assessing it as a mindset the firm should indeed adopt [cf. Pomerantz 1984a]. C’s talk in this section is marked by smiling and laughing voice. In the fifth section (Assessment of present state, lines 30–38), B seems to have found adequate agreement on C’s part and continues along the humorous lines C has set. Member B further emphasizes the proposal by noting that money coming in as a result of one’s own efforts is more valuable than money that comes in from clients that have contacted the firm first. After this comment, C laughs.

During the entire sequence, members C and B intertwine their talk activities in restating and reinforcing B’s proposal, whereas E, after offering only minimal token acknowledgement (line 13), remains silent. From line 21 onwards, however, E attempts to gain the next turn. E finally succeeds (line 37) and assesses the actual situation of the firm. Instead of anticipating client needs, the firm tends to merely wait for clients to contact them. Member C accepts this assessment by calling it ‘re-

ceiving orders'. After this discussion, B further reinforces this proposal by providing an example of failing to personally anticipate one particular client (not shown in the transcript). Thereafter, the discussion moved on to other topics.

In summary, even though the core of the proposal addressed a potentially delicate issue (embarrassing non-action), member B managed to deliver it in an engaging manner without being insulting and to garner initial support for it. Mutual access to the justification of the proposal was constructed by recounting experiences of the unacceptable behavior member B described. No commitment decisions were made, however. From the theoretical viewpoint of entrepreneurship, the idea of anticipating client needs laid out in the sequence can be interpreted to address the proactiveness dimension of entrepreneurial orientation and intrapreneurship. Proactive behavior underscores initiating actions over responding to them, taking the initiative toward clients and being ahead of the market [Antoncic & Hisrich 2003; Lumpkin & Dess 1996, 2001]. B's proposal reinterprets proactiveness as anticipation and links it specifically to clients and their needs. Reactive action, such as merely receiving orders from clients, was described as embarrassing and not in line with a proper sales culture.

### ***3.2. Presenting a proposal to apply new perspectives to service development***

The second example of presenting a proposal of new sales practices concerns the firm's service portfolio. Extract 2 is drawn from the beginning of the third meeting. The members discussed the current status of some of their client projects. Member B concluded that these projects mainly revolved around their basic services. Even though these services are crucial to sales now, they are nonetheless services that all their competitors also offer. These observations served as a foundation for the proposal that member B presented next:

#### **Extract 2 (Meeting 3, 0:06:07–0:06:42, all members present)**

##### **Extract 2–1 PROPOSAL**

01 B: what if one could really look at the entire firm somehow  
02 like from a completely new perspective (1.0)  
03 to bring them ((clients)) those kinds of thoughts  
04 that they have not even been able to think about themselves  
05 that from which they could look at  
06 A: mm

In the first section (Proposal, lines 1–6), member B suggests that they view their clients ('the entire firm') from a perspective that is so new, no one has thought of



it before. The essence of this proposal is in presenting clients with something unheard of that could make them realize their business in a new way. Even though the proposal contains enthusiasm about the new idea ('really', 'completely new'), B's expressions ('somehow', 'what if') evince some doubt. Member B does not seem to take it for granted that these new perspectives would automatically or easily emerge. Rather, such new perspectives may require extensive effort on the part of the case firm before submitting anything to their clients' closer scrutiny. Next, member D participates in the conversation by commenting on the specific situation of one particular client:

### **Extract 2-2 COMPETING PERSPECTIVES**

07 D: well there ((at a particular client)) the business is now at  
08 B: mm  
09 D: such a situation that they just have to  
10 B: yeah  
11 D: first set goals for thems(h)elves  
12 B: yes yes [this is (.) now they are at that stage but  
13 D: [that that is just something (.)  
14 that the business no doubt demands for the next half a year  
15 B: yes but when one thinks about our offering (.)  
16 a bit further  
17 C: mm  
18 B: over a longer term

In the second section (Competing perspectives, lines 7–18), member D first recounts the situation of a particular client. D points out that this client actually needs not only now, but also in the near future, the very basic services that the firm offers (line 11). D emphasizes this position with extreme case formulations ('just have to', 'no doubt'). Member B agrees ('yes yes'), but reduces the absoluteness of D's point by stating that this is only a stage that will eventually pass. D's and B's turns can be interpreted as competing perspectives (i.e., that of the case firm and that of the client) that aim to build common ground for the content of the proposal. The simultaneous existence of these two views would represent a mutually-shared knowledge on which to ground the proposal. In practice, then, even though the firm must meet its clients' immediate, short-term needs with basic services, it should, at the same time, also anticipate its clients' future needs. Member B seems to indicate that short-term issues eventually blow over ('now they are at that stage') and new issues will emerge. This occurrence requires something extraordinary in the form of a new perspective. B further specifies that these new perspectives are related to their own long-term offering (i.e. how they are able to develop the content of their service portfolio to match their clients' future needs). Next, member A agrees with B's proposal:

### Extract 2–3 ALIGNMENT/AGREEMENT THROUGH ASSESSMENT

- 19 A: so I believe that (.) that from this (.) if we get from (.)  
20 this kind of thinking (.) something more for our business  
21 so I claim that that could that is something that  
22 B: yeah  
23 A: no one else  
24 B: yeah  
25 A: necessarily does

In the third section (Alignment/Agreement through assessment, lines 19–25), member A gives credit to B's proposal by assessing it as a way by which the firm could differentiate itself from its competitors ('no one else') and create something new. In addition to offering new ideas to clients, service portfolio development would also serve as a tool to help the firm stand above its competition. Both B and A have thus identified an opportunity in a new kind of thinking that could potentially help their business with respect to its clients and competitors. At this particular moment, however, this opportunity seems quite unclear ('something more our business') and distant ('if', line 19). The discussion continues for some time along these lines (not shown in the transcript). However, the members made no decisions about how to apply these new perspectives even though they agreed on their importance.

From the theoretical perspective of entrepreneurship, Extract 2 can be interpreted to deal with innovativeness. Innovativeness is typically related to the creation of new products and services, but the literature also explicitly mentions other types of newness. These include new administrative techniques, operating technologies and processes, but the array is not limited to these definitions alone [Antoncic & Hisrich 2003; Covin & Slevin 1989]. Therefore, one can safely view new perspectives as one specific form of innovativeness. The proposal laid out in this extract connects innovativeness in the form of completely new, unprecedented perspectives to service development in particular. The proposal can be interpreted to indicate that, without new perspectives, only short-term client needs can be fulfilled. This would, in the long run, be detrimental to the firm's business and sales efforts. To conclude, the proposals in this and the previous extract dealt with the future activities of the case firm and highlighted the fact that the firm must understand *now* what will happen in the future in order to make that future happen.

### ***3.3. Responding to an individual-level sales complaint with a proposal of personal responsibility***

The third proposal addresses individual-level, sales-related complaints. The common feature in this type of proposals in the research material is the idea of personal responsibility as a solution to sales problems. Immediately before Extract 3, the group

had discussed how the firm allocates incoming client projects to the management group members. Member C stated a general rule by explaining that each project is allocated to the person who has the most expertise in that particular field. Member D followed with a question and a complaint:

### **Extract 3 (Meeting 2 1:20:07–1:20:34, all members present)**

#### **Extract 3–1 COMPLAINT**

01 D: [has this happened in practice for example international cases  
02 I have been awfully seldom in on ca°ses°  
03 (3.0)  
04 D: #Cli[ent1 I'm not in on#

#### **Extract 3–2 TENTATIVE EXPLANATION**

05 C: [well I mean  
06 (1.0)  
07 C: yeah but [one does have to  
08 D: [(together) ()  
09 C: in one way or another then [also allocate them ()  
10 D: [mm

In the first section of this sequence (Complaint, lines 1–4), member D formulates a cautious (quiet voice, longer pause) personal complaint about not having participated in client projects that concern international cases. Although these cases would fall within D's area of expertise, D has nevertheless not taken part in them. Member D further emphasizes this stance by referring, in a slightly ironic tone of voice, to a specific client firm ("Client1") that actually bought this type of project from the case firm. Instead of D, however, someone else was responsible for the project. No one joins the complaining activity, and D thus fails to receive affiliation from others. Affiliation could, in fact, be problematic because D's complaint can also be interpreted as assigning blame for the formulated state of affairs [Heinemann & Traverso 2009].

In the second section (Tentative explanation, lines 5–10), member C explains in a slightly hesitant manner (hesitation tokens, a short pause) that one must distribute the projects 'in one way or another'. Such hesitation is understandable because D's claim contradicts what C just said earlier about the general allocation rule (i.e. allocation seems, in this case, to have occurred on some other grounds). D, in fact, withholds acceptance of this explanation ('mm'). Thereafter, a turn-taking competition ensues (not shown in the transcript). Member A emerges as the winner and continues the discussion:

#### **Extract 3–3 PROPOSAL**

15 A: I I would somehow like to emphasize that  
16 well one should also consider it from the perspective that (.)



complaint by implicitly proposing that D take the initiative in finding new projects of interest. After the practical example, D continues and puts forward another personal complaint to which A responds with another recommendation of personal responsibility (not shown in the transcript). Member A reinforces the proposal with a practical example that entails the idea of simply asking colleagues for permission to join in on their client projects. Member D offers no comment, but B agrees with the proposal. Member E, however, explicitly rejects it:

### Extract 3–6 REJECTION

81 E: no but yea but there is this thing here (.) also  
 82 that i- if one asks just as I have many times sai-  
 ((6 lines removed))  
 89 I have talked about it for a year but I have not been allowed in  
 ((2 lines removed))  
 92 so that it doesn't happen just by asking .hh (.) n: it doesn't

In the sixth section (Rejection, lines 81–92), member E rejects A's proposal because, according to E, it has proved ineffective in practice. Member E claims to have behaved according to the proposed action on many occasions ('for a year'), but has so far met with refusal. At this, members E and A continue their argument, which quickly dies down, however, and ends with a short silence (not shown in the transcript). Thereafter, the discussion moves on to other topics.

From the theoretical perspective of entrepreneurship, Extract 3 can be interpreted to deal with autonomy. Autonomy is defined as the independent action of an individual or team in bringing forth an opportunity and carrying it through to completion [Lumpkin & Dess 1996]. A firm should support the efforts of independently working individuals and teams that make decisions on their own about what business opportunities to pursue, regardless of organizational constraints [Lumpkin, Cogliser & Schneider 2009]. These initiatives should play a major role when the firm identifies and selects suitable opportunities in the marketplace. Member A's proposal can be described as an elaborated recommendation of personal responsibility, supported by practical examples. To move from mere complaining to solving the actual problem behind each complaint, members should take personal responsibility, initiate corrective actions and follow them through to completion. Complaining would be considered undesirable, and negative inferences would color the complaining persons, whereas personal responsibility is considered the proper, routine way of handling unsatisfactory matters.

## Summary of the analysis

Considering all five recordings, the management group members were especially worried about finding ways to increase and improve their sales efforts. Selling can be considered relevant to entrepreneurship because firms normally realize their economic performance through sales activities. In fact, EO research most often operationalizes the effectiveness of EO activities as sales growth and views growth in other dimensions as a result of increased sales [Wiklund 1999; Wales, Gupta & Mousa 2011]. In their meeting discourse, members constructed new entrepreneurial practices to solve the problems they had encountered in selling. These practices included: 1) presenting a proposal to anticipate client needs, 2) presenting a proposal to apply new perspectives to service development, and 3) responding to an individual-level sales complaint with a proposal of personal responsibility.

In the analysis, the content of the proposals was linked to entrepreneurship by means of the theoretical concepts of proactive, innovative and independent action [Antoncic & Hisrich 2003; Lumpkin & Dess 1996, 2001]. Proactiveness in the form of anticipating client needs, innovativeness in the form of generating new unprecedented perspectives, and autonomy in the form of assuming encompassing personal responsibility could, in the view of the management group members, improve the overall success of sales efforts. Compared to the theoretical concepts of proactiveness, innovativeness and autonomy, the members thus gave these dimensions of entrepreneurial behavior a somewhat new interpretation.

The structural process of how the management group members negotiated the new sales practices exemplifies typical decision-making sequences in interaction [Stevanovic 2012]. The departure point for the sales practices was a formulation of a *present* state of affairs based on *past* behavior in sales. These formulations often took on a negative form (i.e. a complaint), such as something the firm or an individual member had *failed* to do (e.g. failing to understand what clients need before clients request it from the firm). Thus, the management group members formulated a *present* problem in sales that required a solution. In order for the *future* state of affairs to improve, the members proposed entrepreneurial practices for selling. They did not treat these practices as an accomplished, ongoing action, but introduced them in the form of proposals which they should begin implementing. However, even though the members seemed to possess discursive tools to build access to commonly-shared ideals of entrepreneurship and to agree on some of the practices, they made no formal commitment to the proposed practices.

## Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that collaborative decision-making about new practices to solve jointly-acknowledged, performance-related problems may be particularly relevant in the emergent stages of entrepreneurship. New practices may initially be discussed and decided on in response to organizational problems that impede firms to reach their economic goals. The process of transforming outdated and ineffective current practices into new entrepreneurial ones may represent a means to implement strategic, firm-level entrepreneurial ideals into everyday operation. These transformation processes typically take place in meeting interaction.

The findings further indicate that entrepreneurship, like any other organizational phenomenon, may be founded on a decision-making process of proposals, access, agreement and commitment. In order to become effective, entrepreneurship may require and be founded on a continuous line of decisions in which organizational members negotiate new practices and concrete details of entrepreneurship, and try to convince themselves of their utility. These decisions can focus on assessing past behavior, building a shared understanding of entrepreneurial ideals, agreeing on desired future states of affairs and securing wide organizational commitment to common practices on a continuous basis.

As the detailed analysis demonstrated, the decision-making process requires particular conversational subtlety. For example, complaints may be an effective means to assess and problematize past practices but their formulation demands consideration because complainants may not otherwise reach their goal of bringing organizational problems to other participants' attention [see Heinemann & Traverso 2009]. In general, maintaining good working relationships between organizational members may hence be particularly relevant when new practices are being negotiated in interaction. Proposals, for their part, may represent a potent vehicle for participants to negotiate experience-based practices to reach desirable future states. Proposals also place all participants in an equal position to evaluate and commit to the suggested action [see Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012]. However, if proposals are formulated in explicitly accusatory or declarative manners or unilaterally imposed on other participants, they may fail to meet with agreement and to evoke commitment. In the present research material, this problem seemed to concern the autonomy dimension of entrepreneurship. Complaining about sales problems led to recommendations of personal responsibility that were met also with disagreement and overt rejection, unlike the proposals about innovativeness and proactiveness.

The decision-making sequences described here ended without the participants reaching formal commitment decisions during the five recorded meetings. All decision-making sequences may indeed neither begin nor end within the relatively short time-frame of a single interaction sequence or meeting, or even in several consecutive meetings. This observation can be especially important in complex organizational

phenomena such as entrepreneurship. While the structural joint decision-making process as such may proceed similarly, it can be quite a different matter for organizational members to decide whether to buy a new copy machine to solve printing problems [see Huisman 2001] or to commit to new practices to solve collective firm-level financial problems. Therefore, a failure to reach commitment decisions offers no reason to assume that entrepreneurship would *not* be a joint decision-making process. In fact, the difficulty to commit to entrepreneurial practices may be the practical stumbling block for organizations interested in improving their financial standing. As this study indicated, organizational members may possess an easy access to shared understandings of entrepreneurial ideals, and even relatively effortlessly acknowledge and agree on the content and benefits of entrepreneurship. The decision-making process can, however, be blocked at the final commitment stage.

Several reasons may explain why commitment decisions were entirely absent from the research material. First, the entrepreneurial practices failed to explain the desired behavior in detail, but remained abstract instead (apart from Extract 3–5). In fact, it may be relatively straightforward to agree on general practices, but quite difficult to commit to them because they leave the particulars open; this can later on lead to arbitrary attributions of responsibility, at least from the perspective of the individual actor. Second, the meeting participants also used the practices in their discourse to steer the conversation away from delicate issues and to avoid directly addressing complaints on a personal level. As a result, the argumentative purposes for which entrepreneurial ideals are used in interaction may represent an obstacle to commitment. Third, some dimensions of entrepreneurship may be too dilemmatic to be easily oriented to as self-evident ideals. In this study, the autonomy dimension seemed to occupy such a position. Finally, autonomous action allows for individual members pursuing opportunities to make decisions on their own [Lumpkin, Cogliser & Schneider 2009]. Therefore, they are also free to decide *not* to do something, as in choosing *not* to commit to collective practices.

This study further indicates that access, agreement and commitment are contingent on those organizational members who presumably behave according to new practices in their work. This was the case in the case firm because all management group members also worked as salespersons and were therefore targets of the newly-formulated practices. In order for entrepreneurship to actually emerge, however, the relevant individuals may need to participate in discussions which build common ground for entrepreneurial ideals and define the details of desired entrepreneurial behavior. In these discussions, some participants may assume the position of defining the desired behavior while others co-participate by agreeing, rejecting, assessing, contesting and reformulating this behavior, and steering the proposal actively towards a decision. In fact, permitting competing perspectives and subsequent versions of current and future states to emerge may help organizations gain wider support for new practices. Further, participation in joint decision-making that is



allowed to extend over several meetings may be essential for agreement because, without them, commitment may also be wanting.

The present study demonstrated one process by which new practices were negotiated in meeting interaction, but obviously offered no exhaustive description of other types of processes that may exist in the everyday realities of other firms. The findings are, however, one possible interpretation of the research material and are thus generalizable as a *possibility* for other business service organizations. The generalizability of possibilities is a view taken by social scientists to explain the validity of qualitative research in social interaction [Peräkylä 2004].

In conclusion, the findings of this study conceptualize the emergence of entrepreneurship as a four-stage, joint decision-making process of proposal, access, agreement and commitment. In this process, complaints problematize past practices and proposals construct experience-based solutions to reach desirable outcomes. Future research could continue examining entrepreneurship in interaction situations in order to understand how and why especially the commitment stage of the decision-making process may be wanting. These new perspectives could in turn yield a deeper insight into the practical obstacles that organizations face before they can commit to entrepreneurial actions.

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## ***APPENDIX 1. Transcription conventions***

[	the point of overlap onset
(. )	a micropause
(1.2)	silence timed in seconds
↑yes	rising intonation
↓yes	falling intonation
ye:s	lengthening of the sound
ye-	cut off
YES	increased volume
°yes°	especially soft sounds relative to the surrounding talk
<u>yes</u>	emphasis
#yes#	different voice quality relative to the surrounding talk
<yes>	slower speech
y(h)es	laughing voice
£yes£	smiling voice
heh heh	laugh
.hh	audible intake of breath
( )	dubious hearings
(( ))	transcriber's comments