

## **Multiple Entrepreneurial Intentions: An individual case study**

Contemporary research has shown that entrepreneurial intentions (EI) have become an increasingly popular topic of investigation. That-being-said, whereas the parent field of entrepreneurship is acknowledging its inherent dynamic and processual nature the same is not true of EI. The current paper therefore seeks to apply an emerging meta-theoretical process framework in the form of Manuel Delanda's Assemblage Theory (AT) in ambition to extend our knowledge of how EIs unfold over time. A single in-depth case study design was implemented to track changes in an individual's entrepreneurial intending. Data were captured using semi-structured interviews and then analyzed using NVivo coding software. Findings suggest that it is through the interaction of contextually defined factors and their unique capacities that an emergent intentional whole can be created. The current contribution provides a foundation to consider intent through a more socially situated outlook and can act as a platform to guide further research in the area. The concept of entrepreneurial process intentions is introduced to atone for the dynamic interplay between spatially and temporally bound factors that can lead to a specific form of EI emerging.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship; Intention; Entrepreneurial Intention; Cognition, Process

## **Introduction**

‘...the *Theory of Planned Behaviour* does not theorise how cognitions change, thus calling into question whether it is a theory of behaviour change at all’ (Sniehotta, Pesseau & Araújo-Soares, 2014, p. 3)

Entrepreneurship is a turbulent process of change and emergence that involves iterative cycles of acting, information gathering and reducing uncertainty (McMullen & Dimov 2013; Moroz & Hindle, 2012). This would suggest that it is not a one-time moment of visionary insight (Dimov, 2007). Instead, it is purposefully driven by the construct of intentionality, which, in entrepreneurial terms, commonly represents the ‘self-acknowledged conviction by a person that they intend to set up a new business venture and consciously plan to do so at some point in the future’ (Thompson, 2009, p. 676).

The idea of change in entrepreneurial intention (EI) research can present a problem. Intentional strength is often associated with stability and therefore the tendency is to reify its perceived enduring nature by paying attention to those individuals who demonstrate ‘high levels’. As consequence, certain research approaches are inclined to assume a positivist orthodoxy, drawing implication from ex-post-facto driven designs. Common features include the addition of variables in heavily used linear models such as Ajzen’s (1991) *Theory of Planned Behavior* (Belló et al. 2018; Roy et al. 2017; Trivedi, 2017) as mentioned in the opening quote. Alternatively, explorations of interaction pathways within and across models have been examined via the reconfiguration of precursory constructs identifying several interesting moderating and mediating effects (Hsu et al. 2019; Tsai et al. 2016; Zhang & Cain, 2017).

The capacity for these models to predict EI is well established, building a strong foundation for the field (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015). However, this method can become problematic. For example, many scholars adopt different scope conditions in their study of EI, meaning that resultant operationalizations can vary boundary conditions and consistency across work (Donaldson, 2019). Additionally, predictive models with their correlational focus on primary motivators and causal variables (Douglas et al. 2021) can oversimplify core entrepreneurial themes such as timing, a multiplicity of actions, and other contingently grounded determinants (Kariv et al. 2019).

Considering that EIs do not always transpire into observable behaviours (Gielnik et al. 2014), and an intention's capacity to predict actual engagement is severely underdeveloped (Van Gelderen et al. 2015), we remain ignorant of the experientially lived and unpredictable nature of the context in which they operate (Morris et al. 2012; Schindehutte & Morris, 2009; Steyeart, 2007). Valuable contributions adding to the more prominent traditional styles may be sought elsewhere by adopting innovative approaches that can capture intentional evolution (Elfving et al. 2009). This stance recognizes the possibility of a configural tension amongst multiple, and even conflicting, motivational beliefs held at a given time (Douglas, 2013; Douglas et al. 2021).

For example, if we look toward the literature surrounding entrepreneurship motivation in more general terms, we see that one may be drawn towards entrepreneurship for a variety of different reasons such as those that are personal (Shir et al. 2019), extrinsic (Simons & Astebro, 2010), psychological (Wiklund et al. 2019) or pro-social (Bacq & Alt, 2018). Additionally, entrepreneurship sub-types exist that consider certain demographics and their spatio-temporal positioning including 'elderpreneurs' (Watkins-Mathys, 2012) 'mumpreneurs' (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013), 'migrant-preneurs' (Levie, 2007), 'refugee-preneurs' (Bizri, 2017), 'academic-preneurs' (Siegel & Wright, 2015) and

‘hobbyists’ (Kwapisz, 2020). Furthermore, entrepreneurial individuals need not pursue a career path that is solely centered around the creation of a new venture and can instead choose to apply their skills within existing organizations as ‘intra-preneurs’ (Gawke et al. 2017) opening alternative conceptualizations of what an EI represents.

Research has begun to address this issue of heterogeneity guided by the belief that entrepreneurship is a complex behaviour driven by many different, and concomitantly operating motivational beliefs (for example, Douglas et al. 2020; Douglas & Prentice, 2019). This motivational disparity signals a need to develop understanding of how potentially competing motivations reflect the type of career one wishes to pursue, the type of entrepreneur that they wish to become, and the intentional form that they hold at a given time (Douglas et al. 2021).

### **Objectives of the study**

In line with these more recent contributions this paper breaks away from progressive extensions of traditional methods (Patriotta, 2017) through a novel ontological shift (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017). Movement is made toward process thinking (Cloutier & Langley, 2020) in quest of finding solution towards the question of:

*How do different forms of EI evolve over time?*

Taking greater heed of events that are unanticipated and develop discontinuously (Morris et al. 2012; Tsoukas, 2010), the evolving nature of different forms of EI is qualitatively assessed through the lens of Assemblage Theory (AT) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Delanda 2006, 2016; Rutzou & Elder-Vass, 2019). AT provides a fresh ontological outlook to current variance-based practice through perceiving entities to be composed of specific aggregates of heterogenous elements within a given contextual space. Using AT,

we have been afforded the ability to analytically venture beyond perceived dichotomies - including that of agency and structure - moving toward relational flows and interactions. From this philosophical positioning we were able to embrace the belief that individuals are embedded in the experiences of their own life worlds with motivations dependent upon associated contingencies.

Findings from a single in-depth case study indicate that it is through the interaction of the unique capacities of endogenous and exogenous influencers that an emergent intentional whole can be created. Furthermore, AT's analytical dimensional scaffolding allowed us to consider these factors and their interactions both temporally and spatially. From this, synthetic factors that can act as intentional stabilizers or destabilizers were discovered. Changes in EI form marked the process and were labelled *entrepreneurial process intentions*, meaning that an individual can hold multiple intentions (not limited to a traditional business entry scope).

Overall, this paper contributes to, and expands upon two ongoing conversations in the field. Firstly, it builds on – and complements - the holistic modelling approach to EI (Douglas et al. 2021). This approach accepts a more expansive and diversified view of entrepreneurial behaviour. In doing so movement beyond restricted and causative models and their focus on specific outcomes derivative from *a priori* set dependent variables is achieved. EI thus emerges from a motivational mix based on combinations of capability, circumstance, and preference (Douglas et al. 2021). Furthermore, and as a sub-benefit, we incorporate the influence that external shocks, such as a personally meaningful family event or a financial crisis, can have on EI configuration.

Secondly, and related to our first contribution, a rejuvenation of EI research is created through advancing understanding of the 'how' questions (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990)

related to ‘everyday’ entrepreneurial activities (Welter et al. 2017). A useful way in which we can comprehend the emergence of EI and its associated unique forms through qualitative enquiry is put forth (Van Burg et al. 2020). By challenging the current mold of theorizing and accepting EIs as being socially situated within unfolding and ever-changing environments, the influence of time and uncertainty is made possible (Hindle, 2004). Restricting EI study to initial conditions can obscure how entrepreneurs act under uncertainty and shape their own journeys thereafter (Dolmans et al. 2014; McMullen & Dimov 2013). Taking intentionality beyond its confinement within the pre-founding stage of a new venture we meet the calls of Grégoire et al. (2011) for more process-oriented studies in entrepreneurial cognition research.

The study is presented in six sections. Firstly, it offers a brief discussion of contemporary EI scholarship and its apparent disconnectedness from research practices that can arguably provide more comprehensive coverage. Secondly, AT is introduced with a description of how it imparts a stance that has the potential to bridge this gap by embracing both structure and fluidity. Third, the methodology used is outlined which is then followed by a fourth section detailing the case narrative. Section five attempts to describe the potential mechanisms at play throughout the intentional transformation process. The sixth and final section summarizes the work.

## **Literature Review**

### **Entrepreneurial Intentions and the ontological divide: Shifting forward**

From the perspective of Grégoire et al. (2011), an outcome-focused approach in EI research has meant that the area has in many ways fallen victim to its own achievement since, given the positive findings encountered there is little incentive to explore its full complexity. Nonetheless, and withstanding their success, simplistic cross-sectional

explanatory models based on definitive boundary conditions are representative of average case scenarios when in reality entrepreneurs are often defined by difference (Douglas et al. 2020).

The formation of an EI does not automatically translate into action and its perceived utility is taken to transcend beyond a single type or timepoint (Douglas et al. 2020). Temporal dynamics, though gaining traction (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Gielnik et al. 2014; Hopp & Sondregger, 2015; Kautonen et al. 2015; Van Gelderen et al. 2015), are very much underrepresented in associated work. Even within this small corpus many studies still resort to prolonged cross-sectional designs that cannot fully capture the belief that EI outcomes may be multiple (Douglas et al. 2021).

In close alignment with this temporal outlook, the ‘context lens’ (Welter, 2011, p. 167) which accepts the way in which entrepreneurs are situated within their own specific environments (Davidsson, 2004) is by-in-large driven by positivist methodologies. Research adopts an apparent study ‘of’ a particular context or its associated features, as opposed to examining perceptual alterations as contexts unfold and evolve (see Bullough et al. 2014; Liñán et al. 2016; Stuetzer et al. 2014). This is a key underdeveloped area as both contexts, and our beliefs about them, can change over time (Dolmans et al. 2014). These subjective experiences derive from complex interactions in specific settings and can provide a mechanism in which we can incorporate process thinking into EI research (Baker & Powell, 2016; Servantie & Rispal, 2018).

This entails an ontological shift emphasizing the contingency and dynamism (Rutzou & Elder-Vass, 2019) of integrated groupings of connected events that unfold in conjoint coordination (Rescher, 1996). In other words, process. Thus, thinking advances toward the acceptance of transformative processes of the mind, consciously or sub-consciously,

based on external and internal sensory stimuli that may or may not have been anticipated. Given that interactions will occur between elements that are relatively stable, and those that are more superfluous, an ontological position that can embrace both may be most beneficial.

This challenge can be effectively met through the application of what is considered to be one of the most developed process ontologies of social science, namely AT (Delanda 2006, 2016; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Rutzou & Elder-Vass, 2019). AT permits envisioning EI as a conceptual entity that is born from an entanglement of events, activities, and perceptions, as opposed to being the outcome of purely relatively stable and discrete structures.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Assemblage Theory: An ontological bridging mechanism**

As mentioned in the previous section the most widely used theoretical models in the study of EI have foundation in volitional decision-making processes whereby one expects some sort of outcome to occur that is subjectively appraised in relation to the value it holds for a given individual (Douglas et al. 2020). Whilst the application of these theories is useful in determining EI at a single time point, there is little to no focus on experiences and beliefs after an initial intent has been articulated. What is missing therefore are explanations grounded in process thinking which can help in the generation of new and novel research questions that have yet to surface, such as those associated with intentional instability and conflicting beliefs.

These types of questions have gained evermore importance considering that entrepreneurial action can never be certain. Consider effectual reasoning that embraces the mobilization of resources and capacities from an identity, social and human capital



perspective (Sarasvathy, 2001). Emphasis is placed on the means at hand and their subsequent exploitation as triggers to the emergence of entrepreneurial behaviors (Servantie & Rispal, 2018). This suggests that not all subsequent behavior can be anchored on initial conditions or a linear framing as the entrepreneurial process will evolve in discontinuous ways (Fisher, 2012). Effectuation theory accepts a multi-dimensional approach yet has received criticism in its neglect of context (Arend et al. 2016). Given its apparent disproportionate focus on individual agency, context can become under-theorized (Kitching and Rouse, 2020). Therefore, although a highly influential and useful process theory to study behaviors, for EI we need a theory that can capture all environmental aspects.

Thus, for us AT provides a process view that can help us to understand post-articulation intentional stability (or a lack thereof). In this way, EIs are no longer studied as an end state but instead are explained as dynamic ensembles of interacting heterogeneous elements that become contingent upon *both* individual and situational factors. The individual and EI move beyond independently studied discrete variables that are linked by association. They become an inexhaustible relational system of both human and non-human parts (Williams, 2010) such that the core tenets exposed by AT can assume a prime position in their analysis.

Assemblage theorists perceive the world as composed of entities that are referred to as assemblages, which are essentially a specific arrangement of heterogeneous elements in a given space (Roffe, 2016). They are ‘a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms’ (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 69). At the core of assemblage theory is an adamant refutation toward the reductionism that is associated with the search for consistent conjunctions of events (Rutzou & Elder-Vass, 2019). Therefore, they are perceived as compositions that are characterized by change and singularity.

In this way they are not fixed, but rather unstable and organized aggregates of co-functioning parts and wholes, allowing us to consider the changing nature of intentional forms throughout time (Delanda, 2006). As a form of systems-based thinking an emphasis is placed upon differences between parts, in contrast to relationships of interiority of a fused whole. Such interactions include both human and non-human components, for example, material forms (e.g., people, technology, and things); practices (action); knowledge (concepts and discourses); social organizations (culture and other institutions), and expressions (speech, affect and desires). An EI could be seen as consisting of a complex arrangement of social, material and expressive forces interacting with one another and produced from certain events, emotional states, and desires (Delanda, 2016).

AT's usefulness within organizational studies has recently been verified through its deployment across several different disciplines including internationalization of family firms (Reuber, 2016); marketing (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015) and creativity (Duff & Sumartojo, 2017). The latter has indicated an applicability towards the cognitive domain with Price-Robertson and Duff (2016) advocating its potential in revitalizing the field of psychology. Although commonly applied to contend with social complexities at broader scales such as markets and communities, importantly for EI, assemblages are present at all levels of reality, even within biological and neurological processes (Delanda, 2016).

Assemblages are defined along two dimensional foci, one vertical and one horizontal. The former deals with functional roles that contain a mixture of material (spatial and objective) and expressive (signs, symbols, identities, and desires) components that vary in terms of their respective concentrations. The horizontal dimension, however, alerts us as to how entities emerge and are sustained. Their identity is either stabilized into internal homogeneity and coherency (territorialization), or destabilized, being made incoherent,

but affording new transformative functional capacities based upon boundary alterations (deterritorialization). What lies between these two dimensions is a state between stability and instability that opens a space of possibility for intentional transformation that current linear models do not appear to be able to accommodate (Douglas et al. 2021).

Realizing an ontological need for the incorporation of both contingency and the causal capacities of things or objects, emphasis is placed on interaction accompanied by experience. Thus, there is an explicit appreciation of both instability (episodic contextual responses), and consistent causal powers (more enduring individual characteristics). Herein lies an indication of emergence thinking, whereby parts constantly interact, and their capacities each have something to offer the emergent whole. If we were to relate this line of thought toward EI, we may suggest that it could prove futile in attempting to isolate contributing antecedents through vertical partitioning, without taking into consideration their linkages and relationships with other environmental and contextual factors. By allocating a degree of novelty and immanency to the daily configurations that have the potential to occur, assemblages of capacities (but not the properties of the parts themselves) can emerge.

AT provides the theoretical framework (Figure 1) in which the intentional process is addressed within this paper on the grounds that it can provide greater explanations as to which kinds of scalar combinations or relations are involved in the production and maintenance of EIs in particular contexts. EIs may become stabilized in certain environments, whereas in others, the configurations may be unstable and more susceptible to change. This idea of situated intent reflects a critical realist posture that embraces stratified and mediated knowledge. Critical Realism provides a middle ground between positivistic and post-modernistic ideals. It condones a realist ontological position whilst simultaneously epistemologically erring towards a more interpretive view and thus

it largely escapes the suggested naivety of the somewhat extremist assumptions of the realist or naturalist. In essence, critical realists are in acceptance of the belief that the world exists beyond our interpretations however our capacity to identify it is influenced by socially constructed and fallible perceptions. This critical realist stance is enhanced in the current work through its combination with the transience of AT that provides a bridging mechanism to account for both the influence of objects and the influence of process theory and its affiliation with unique configurations.

**[Insert Figure 1 here]**

### **Methodology**

A single case study method provided the empirical mechanism to reveal individual intending over time. The individual case (the entrepreneur) is advantageous given that it allowed us to fit our theoretical framework within the local empirical knowledge of the context (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). In this way, more precise and reliable understandings could be developed, with any contextual nuances perceived less likely to become lost across multiple cases.

Furthermore, given that the aim of the study was to examine EI from a processual perspective, the single case is deemed an interesting opportunity to adjust our fundamental understanding of how EIs operate through focusing on the entrepreneur as a representative of embedded experience (Chirkov, 2021; Tsoukas, 2009). Value of a single case study on this occasion should therefore not be disregarded given its potential to generate new research paths through a revisiting of EI at a more fundamental level

(Kennedy, 1979). This is something that leading scholar and entrepreneurship activist Norris Krueger (2017) advocates as necessary to the field's progress.

Inspiration for the study stemmed from the opportunity to gain high levels of access to an individual, who at the time was involved in re-entering the new venture creation process and had previously created his own successful business venture. This could be described as a purposeful approach to sampling in which an information-rich case was selected (Servantie & Rispal, 2018). Initial communication was established with the owner, a 54-year-old Spanish male (throughout the paper referred to by the pseudonym 'the entrepreneur' due to privacy reasons) in the year 2012. Currently, he is the owner of a small to medium-sized enterprise in the Spanish construction industry.

This is an interesting context, given its cyclical and turbulent nature and its clear potential to allow for a dynamic tracking of context overtime. Therefore, further justification for the study is grounded in the argument that the setting can be construed as an extreme environment with external and internal fluctuations considered more pronounced than what would normally occur (Yin, 2018). The sector was representative of one of the most vibrant within the Spanish economy in terms of job creation and production before 2008 but it suffered a devastating downturn after the financial crisis.

The approach to the case study was to gain information on the evolution of different forms of EI through their longitudinal tracking. EIs are perceived to continue and transcend the various phases of the entrepreneurship process, i.e., they are not confined to their traditional method of study within the pre-launch period only and are not restricted to the specific sub-setting of creating a business. Therefore, EIs are taken to have a critical influence in guiding the individual throughout the entirety of their entrepreneurial lifepath (Dutta & Thornhill, 2008). This means that although new venture creation is seen as an

important element of the entrepreneurship process, it does not equate to the process itself. From this, potential generalizations toward theory (Yin, 2003) were made to deepen understanding. An engaged approach meant authors iterated between knowledge held, and observations enacted to make sense of the context and relevant information captured (Van de Ven, 2007).

Extensive measures were implemented in order to ensure maximum transparency and rigor in the research process. In doing so, a clear chain of evidence was built that allowed for the iterative construction of a thick description surrounding the main events occurring throughout the study. This description was further supported by a triangulation process involving a range of evidence sources helping to add validity to the information captured and heightened understanding of the case's evolutionary trajectory.

#### ***4.1 Data collection***

From June 2012 until May 2018, twelve semi-structured interviews (see table 1) were conducted, offering the opportunity to gain retrospective insights into EIs held, and to capture their evolution in real time. Interviews involved a series of open-ended questions - considered more effective when dealing with retrospective recounts (Lipton, 1977) – related to the entrepreneur's past and present experiences. These questions permitted the development of previously unconsidered concepts and added to the iterative nature of the research process (Birkinshaw et al. 2016). The initial interview was designed to get a general overview of the entrepreneur and their context from which a more incisive approach to interview structure could be followed in subsequent encounters as the body of understanding and knowledge began to grow.

**[Insert Table 1 here]**

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, with the informant directing how the interview flowed. In other words, the researcher maintained a pragmatism that helped mitigate the impact of a standardized protocol that may have limited knowledge generation (Gioia et al. 2012). Included in the scheme of all interviews were explicit questions regarding the entrepreneur's EI at a particular point in time. The interviews were chaired by the lead author, digitally recorded, and then transcribed verbatim. As the participant's native language is Spanish, all transcripts were translated by a native Spanish speaker who was fluent in English. To ensure maximum accuracy, English translations were back-translated into Spanish to alleviate any discrepancies that might have occurred (Brislin, 1970).

Although interviewing acted as the predominant method of data capture, informal modes of contact were sustained using face-to-face conversations to ascertain feelings and perceptions. Several secondary data sources were also collected for triangulation purposes. These accounted for the multi-faceted composition of reality and diminished the potential influence of biases entering the process. This was accomplished through the retrieval of internal company documents related to strategic, operational, financial, and cultural aspects; country profiles, and industry reports (Yin, 2003).

By way of illustration, industry reports provided information on the dynamics of the sector that could reify by proxy the contraction of business opportunities, whereas internal company documents displayed company profits, sales, and key operations, acting as convenient measures of performance and growth. Additionally, as per the recommendations for qualitative rigor by Ozcan et al (2017) key findings and the model developed were presented to the entrepreneur who was able to confirm that the case history was accurately depicted and thus validated the case model. We described our

interpretation of the model to the entrepreneur emphasizing the objectives of the study whilst highlighting the various forms of EI that emerged. This verification strategy was implemented based on past qualitative research (Servantie & Rispal, 2018) helping to reduce any biases entering the process from both the researcher and informant ends (Vuori and Huy, 2016).

#### ***4.2 Data analysis***

The data gathered from the interviews was collated and analyzed through thematic coding (Langley, 1999) using NVivo 11 software, and with the implementation of first- and second-order coding techniques (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Codes were representative of words or short phrases within the text that symbolically assigned a salient piece of information and were initially guided by existing EI literature and the authors' knowledge in the area (Saldaña, 2015). The first task was to develop an appreciation of the intentional journey through the elucidation of an in-depth and thick description set to the backdrop of the respondent's lifepath. This took into consideration both cognitive decision-making processes and emergent tendencies of EI.

To do so, as with previous research and upon recommendation (MacKay & Chia, 2013; Eisenhardt, 1989) the first-order analysis involved the generation of a case history focusing upon the individual, their environment, and experiences. Beginning with the use of informant-centered terminology (first-order), and then iterating toward those that were researcher-derived allowed for the promotion of "both voices" (Gioia et al. 2012, p. 18). This helped to generate an increased rigor and quality in relation to the connections made between data, emerging concepts, and sense-giving (Table 2).

**[Insert Table 2 here]**



Secondary level analysis then explored structural elements from an AT perspective, scrutinizing the entrepreneur's responses in relation to contextual conditions and elements deemed composite to EI. Movements were made back and forth between capturing the data, its analysis and consulting relevant literature to help refine the logic of emergent themes. This included the search for explanation about the stability and change in EI, concentrating on potential stabilizing and de-stabilizing events. Retroductive processes encouraged elaboration regarding the tendencies of identified structures and their possible causal influence on events.

## **Analysis**

### **Case history: retrospective account**

#### ***Direct experience: Paid Employment Intention***

The entrepreneur was the eldest child born into a family of two other siblings in the year 1964. Brought up in the Valencian province of Spain, his father co-created a business in the construction industry during the 1960's. An overwhelming disdain for all that was academic and an affinity towards working for pecuniary reward saw the entrepreneur discontinue his studies before entry into, what at the time, was equivalent to secondary level education: *'[...] I realized that the formal educational system was not for me, although I enjoyed learning I wanted to gain actual work experience as soon as possible, this was the most important learning for me.'*

At the age 13 he opted to serve as a construction laborer working long hours and taking on many mundane and arduous tasks. This did not dampen his desire towards the world of employment and his attitude remained positive. As he stated himself: *'these tasks provided the necessary, although sometimes not pretty, experiences to learn.'* During this period, the entrepreneur was noticing various gaps in the market, however, did not

perceive himself as someone who would appropriate these in the near future: *'Although there were various potential opportunities that I felt the market was not serving such as the lack of restorative firms I never saw myself filling this need, certainly in the short-term.'*

### ***External shock #1: Business Creation Intention***

Several years passed and in 1985 his father decided to sell the business due to personal reasons which signaled an important life event for the entrepreneur. He was faced with a decision that required a great deal of thought: *'Do I continue working for someone else who I don't know, or do I try to go it alone?'* He had already identified a potential gap in the market (the need for housing restorations) and in the end decided to exploit this opportunity based upon the realization that he had accumulated the necessary skills and capabilities to do so: *'I said to myself that you have developed all the skills you need to do it yourself so maybe now is the right time.'*

The decision was heavily encouraged by many of his co-workers and his family, with the economic climate very accepting of new enterprises: *'[...] if circumstances were different, I am sure that I would not have made the transition, everything appeared to fit into place from getting financial support to the psychological support offered by my family and friends.'* Within a period of one month of his expression of an intent to create his own business he had accrued and served his first customer: *'[...]at this moment my perseverance had paid off, I realized that the business was feasible; that my perceptions matched reality; and for me this is when my business was officially created.'* This achievement reinforced a strong commitment to making his business creation process a success but always within the bounded objective of establishing something that was *'manageable'*.

### ***Business growth: Continuance Intention***

During the period 1986 to 2007 the business continued to grow, the number of employees had increased exponentially from one to approximately 100 and facilities were amplified. This was not in the entrepreneur's original plans and it appeared to be preceded with little rational forethought or ambition. As the entrepreneur stated: *'[...] it is just something that appeared to happen, we did not plan for it, and it was almost happening sub-consciously.'* Chance meetings with various stakeholders, for example an impromptu encounter with a business acquaintance of a friend in early 2000, led to the opportunity to substantially grow the business through investment projects. In this epoch favorable access to external finance was noted as a key exogenous facilitator: *'[...] I had developed contacts and business came from a lot of these. Even when meetings were not planned, I would still meet individuals that offered me contracting projects and of substantial size.'*

This was a stage in which he acknowledged his limitations and began to develop more managerial oriented skills through learning from contracted external providers: *'[...] To improve and remain competitive we needed to educate ourselves. At this point I hired specialists to optimize the business processes and I also tried to develop my own managerial skills.'* It was described as a *'stable situation'* for the entrepreneur who saw no better alternative than to continue what he was doing: *'I never thought of anything else than continuing within the business. I had a strong willingness to keep going.'*

### ***External shock #2: Exit Intention***

In August 2007 distress signals began to amplify in the financial markets. However, the economic environment was perceived as one which based on tradition would not be overly affected by the exogenous shocks from international events. An ill-thought perception, one that would lead to the long and continuous protraction of the Spanish

economy. The entrepreneur in these moments was in a state of disbelief having placed confidence within *'those with a greater knowledge of the conditions'* than he could ever have and *'if they could not have predicted what was to come, how could I have any chance?'* This was clearly an emotive time that had a severe impact on morale as long-term projects had to be discarded at substantial losses, assets were frozen, and an external protectionist environment had emerged.

Events contributed to diminished feelings of self-confidence in the capacity to complete given tasks that not only came from an internal self-doubt, but so too perceptions of feasibility: *'[...] I wasn't sure if I had the ability to carry out my job anymore. Was it really for me? Things were no longer working out the way they were before, honestly, I began to question myself.'*

Family support remained steadfast: *'My close friends and family continued in their strong support and for that I am truly thankful'*, however this was not sufficient to maintain the motivational drive to continue and as consequence, a decision that was *'forced upon'* the entrepreneur was taken to sell the business in late 2010. The entrepreneur's reflection on this decision was fraught with negative emotions who commented: *'It was a moment that I don't like to relive, I was overwhelmed with emotion and above all fear and anger. Anxiety also started to set in as I began to seriously question my desire to be an entrepreneur.'* A clear change of form and direction of intent had occurred as the entrepreneur had to adapt to his current circumstances which eventually lead to business exit.

### **Case history: real time account**

#### ***Reflection: Re-entry Intention***

The period from 2011-2012 was one of deep self-reflection that was burdened by a plethora of influencing moods, feelings, and affective states. At times, the entrepreneur spoke of a frustration towards what had occurred with the desire to *'try something completely new'* in the form of paid employment outside the construction industry. During other moments he indicated an affection and empathy towards those who he employed thinking about the circumstances in which they found themselves considering un-predictable and un-predicted events. Several months passed and based upon his *'underlying passion'* and the fact that there were *'no other options'* a tentative re-entry intention was re-born.

This intention was supported by previously accumulated knowledge and experience. The social infrastructure was already in place having been developed throughout the years and the economic environmental tides were beginning to show slight signs of change. Opportunities, although few, began to present themselves. A clear change in mindset could be observed, one that was much more positive and in clear recognition of the entrepreneur's own self-worth: *'[...] having spent long periods of time contemplating what my next move was to be, I finally realized that these events were simply a new period of learning in my life, just as my time working for my father had been [...] external events were largely out of my control and what I can control I am good at.'*

The new venture creation process gained traction in 2012 within the same industry. However, this time the entrepreneur was driven by conscious efforts to ensure that the business remained one that was manageable. This cautious approach was undergirded by a change in business strategy through the more secure sub-contracting of all employees. Such an approach sought to build upon past accomplishments but simultaneously avoid occasions where chance and unexpected occurrences could have catastrophic consequences. As the entrepreneur began engaging in entrepreneurial activities this

appeared to have a reinforcing impact upon his intention: *'[...] the sensation of connecting with individuals again, is for me incredible, with each conversation I have my desire slowly grows.'*

At the close of study, the entrepreneur remained vigilant of the exogenous shocks that could occur and whose tentative intent had transitioned once again into one of continuance. However, on this occasion there was no inclination to let sub-conscious processes override those of conscious and thoughtful deliberation: *'I will not let myself get carried away with circumstances and the promises of individuals, however each time I encounter business prospects these are dealt with in a pensive, rational and rigorous manner.'*

### **Intentional structures, generative mechanisms, and empirical corroboration**

The sequencing of events was composed of multi-level experiences and conveyed the entrepreneur's intentional journey unfolding across five conceptual forms. These forms evolved and experienced change over time that allowed for the development of a model for this specific case (Figure 2). The current section attempts to explain - from an AT perspective - the generative mechanisms that can lead to the changes witnessed in EI.

**[Insert Figure 2 here]**

Firstly, there was an emergence of a paid employment intention that has definitional foundations in studies that mostly deal with the decision between self-employment versus that which is accompanied by a salary (for example Broomé & Ohlsson, 2017). For many entrepreneurs this is often a motivational stage from which future entrepreneurial behavior can spawn (Brändle & Kukertz, 2021). On this occasion it developed through

conscious thought and was illustrated through the entrepreneur's statement that: '*I had a strong desire to work with my father and get paid, this is what I chose to do.*' It was built upon, and manifested through, the interaction of several factors co-existing within what is described as an *intentional possibility space* recognizing the potential for various heterogeneous elements to connect and combine in specific contextual episodes (Delanda, 2016).

This space is filled with unactualized capacities, tendencies and inclinations towards various behaviours. For paid employment intention these elements included a desire to learn, a want to earn money, the entrepreneur's father owning a company, and an overall disdain for formal schooling. An irreducibility is created as this mixture of properties forms a specific configurative mechanism and cannot simply be lessened to the sum of its parts. Instead, the configurations are bound by relations of exteriority and experience (Delanda, 2016).

For example, the school environment alone does not automatically translate into one wanting to embark on a particular career pathway. Several possibilities can exist such as self-employment or the more extreme transitioning into the category of neither in education nor employment. However, it is the tendency interacting with the opportunity to learn through 'doing' within his father's company that provides a material *external enabler* (Davidsson, 2015; Von Briel et al. 2018). It is through this that the entrepreneur's expressive desires to earn money and leave the formal schooling context could be channeled and satisfied.

This assemblage became territorialized as its boundary conditions sharpened, and role acceptance endured for several years. Parameterization of values therefore occurred as the mixture of expressive versus material and stabilized versus de-stabilized elements

aligned. However, the *external destabilizer* of the company being sold appeared to upset its equilibrium which opened a new space of possibility. An intentional *threshold* was surpassed that can be seen to govern the capacity of an intentional form to be affected by external events (Delanda, 2006). A deterritorialization followed activated by the external *trigger* of not being able to work under his father which disrupted the intentional infrastructure. The company, or the absence of the entrepreneur's father, assumed an alternate role of promoting a business creation intent. The entrepreneur acknowledged: *'Yes, at this moment I had a strong willingness, or intention to create my own business.'*

Indeed, this in combination with the experiential learning process and the material effects of the physical labor endured is suggested to have contributed to such change. To be more precise, an impression of self-realization emerged that was associated with augmented levels of self-efficacy and entrepreneurial competence. This meant that the perceptual bounds of the possibility space were widened helping to shape the entrepreneur's renewed beliefs (Delanda, 2006). Thus, the initial components of the first assemblage spawned (Brändle & Kukertz, 2021) the new business creation intention that followed and the transfer of thinking into action.

Business creation intention is the most widely recognized within EI literature stemming from the seminal contributions of Bird (1988) viewing it as a state of mind directing action towards a business idea. The entrepreneur had already identified several potential opportunities representing an exercised tendency, however, a strong intention to create was only conveyed and acted upon (therefore the tendency was actualized) when a certain compositional threshold of necessary internal individual capacities and external facilitating circumstances commingled.



The causes of creation intention if taken at a given time point as is the case with variance models may have been linearly confounded as enduring stable attitudes and capabilities. Approached in this manner we are limited to an incomplete account of events that bypass the many underlying mechanical intricacies involved (Mingers, 2004). Consider what has gone before, the historical path and the accumulated experience during the entrepreneur's earlier years has served as potential that was only realized in a specific spatio-temporal setting.

In this way, we can clearly distinguish between competences that the entrepreneur has acquired as opposed to those that are dispositional. This is something that variance theorizing through vertical partitioning and a single-time study would find it difficult to achieve (Gregoire, 2016). Although the identified causes are in operation they are not in determination. They act as a trigger to the process of creation intention and are supported by the underlying impact of past occurrences (Bunge, 2017). In the parlance of Delanda (2012), the individual and his thought processes have actualized their capacity to affect but also been affected by what has gone before.

In this scenario, the temporal lag between creation intention and perceived conversion was of a relatively short duration suggesting an ephemeral composition. This short delay may perhaps be required for an effective and efficient transition into actual behaviours, as we have been informed previously of longer durations significantly reducing likelihoods of business creation (Gielnik et al. 2014).

We observe a symbolic and successful engagement with entrepreneurial based action that resulted in the acquisition and serving of the entrepreneur's first customer that generated the perception of feasibility. This event has important implications regarding the intentional process as it emphasizes the idiosyncratic and subjective nature of each

individual's journey. It also highlights the potential self-regulatory effect of expectation beliefs and lived experiences. The entrepreneur, in accordance with the utility of goal pursuit, had his beliefs verified confirming initial expectations that stimulated an intention to continue: *'I never thought of anything else than continuing within the business, I had a strong willingness to keep going.'*

This increase in the subjective likelihood of success was representative of a *reciprocal mechanism* in that initial intention had been reified through subsequent actions and consequences. This would be conceived as a secondary outcome by McMullen and Shepherd (2006) who's purpose serving to reduce uncertainty and promoting feelings of security. Thus, created was a relatively more stable and homogenous intent to continue.

Continuance intention, undergirded by the thinking of scholars such as Van Gelderen et al. (2015), was largely fueled by an assemblage of an external environment conducive to the appropriation of resources. It was one that was open to collaboration and infused with social interactions: *'The business was becoming stabilized and the external environment was very friendly, I had generated a lot of resources and those I didn't have could be easily found. It was positive and as a result I was positive.'* The entrepreneur's cognitive logic appeared to shift from more internal thoughts towards contextual externalities. This created a scenario whereby he was able to act sub-consciously and in routinized fashion meet the needs and wants of the environment. We begin to witness a greater influence of the 'heart' and emotional aspects starting to grasp hold of the process.

Positive experiences emerged helping to augment the entrepreneur's commitment through *expression*. Given the coding properties of expressions derivative from events, objects, and their interactions, they assume a key role in either stabilizing or destabilizing intentions. Specifically, as episodic states, emotions as a form of expression encourage

us to appraise, prepare for, execute, and monitor behaviour in accordance with our contextual environments. Such emotional appraisals are likely to run in parallel with our conscious intending serving as discrepancy checking mechanisms (Carver & Scheier 2013).

Emotions that have negative connotations however are much more likely to cause divergence in our cognitive processing away from goal-directed behaviours. Thus, a destabilization of a given intentional form can be caused. As before, the uncontrollable and unpredictable nature of exogenous events lead to an offsetting of assemblage equilibrium. The onset of the financial downturn of 2008, as a goal incongruent stimulus (Scherer, 2005), generated negative emotions within the entrepreneur. These negative emotions coevolved with decreased expressions of self-efficacy, increases in self-doubt, a protectionist social environment, and reduced perceptions of feasibility. Eventually, this surpassed the *intentional threshold*, transforming into an intention to exit (Wennberg & DeTienne, 2014): *'I just wanted to get out.'*

Interestingly, such relations diminished the impact of social support that had previously served to ignite creation intent which conveys the importance of adopting a contextual lens (Welter, 2011). What was once a key element to the process was now inhibited by the intensity of other experienced parts. Complete closure of the process is therefore not desirable as the stability of intentional intensity and its significance cannot be assumed (Grégoire et al. 2011).

The fifth form of EI observed was the assemblage of experiences leading to a re-entry (Hsu et al. 2017). This was preceded by a lengthy period of self-reflection. Several parts reconnected including the entrepreneur's meta-knowledge of himself and the situation, self-realization of his own capacities, and a more favorable external environment both

social and economic: *'At this moment I can confirm that I have a strong intention to re-enter the industry and create another company.'* On this occasion however, it is a motivational attachment to being an entrepreneur coupled with high levels of affect that seems to spur the establishment of re-entry.

It is recognized that motivations are sculpted at the nexus of the individual and their environmental context (Bird, 2016). In the current case, this nexus has influenced the entrepreneur's decision-making process as interactions between cognitive schemas and the environment increased the salience of his self-perceived levels of expertise (Elsbach et al. 2005). That is, pre-existing self-schemas (related to his entrepreneurial identity) were emphasized in the presence of personally meaningful reflections during a sensemaking process.

Re-entry intention was therefore driven by a passion based on the belief that the entrepreneur was secure in his ability to be successful within the industry. It was undergirded by a self-realization allowing for a more broadened outlook in which more "means-end relationships" were formed to reduce uncertainty and help the entrepreneur meet his strategic goals (Hayton & Cholakova, 2017, p.54). This perhaps has contributed to the development of an adaptive mind (Macrae and Bodenhauser, 2000) as he seeks to override automated action plans in the hope of avoiding many of the mistakes made before. In this way the effects of any future external destabilizers are likely to be curtailed.

## **Discussion**

This case study set out with the ambition to answer the largely unattended to 'how' question of EIs (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990). It was addressed from a process perspective guided by the premise that multiple forms of intentions exist. The approach was designed to enhance EI research by taking into consideration the presence of socially situated

tendencies and their reciprocal relations. The self-perceived core discovery of the work is that multiple and dynamic intentions can be held, and that their emergence is largely dependent upon spatial and temporal circumstances.

Findings, taken through the lens of AT<sup>1</sup>, indicate that differences in intentional forms can transpire, provided that both external and internal conditions are conducive. EIs, in this way, are not considered as confined to the self, but instead conceived to exist as products of the relationships between the entrepreneur and their environment at a particular point in time. EI becomes a transitory and temporally bound outcome. The importance of accepting EIs as socially situated within unfolding processes allows for an anchoring beyond internal control in which any particular type of EI can be formed. Individuals become inextricably embedded in their contexts making it possible to establish, affirm, or modify intentions.

Given that statistical modelling dominates the study of EI, the novel approach of a critical realist perspective incorporating Delanda's theorizing has shown that situated relations and exchanges between endogenous and exogenous variables are perhaps better examined through more qualitative means (Hindle, 2004). From a qualitative perspective, identification of increasingly complex mechanisms has been provided, however, caution in interpretation is urged as circumstantial and historical contingencies do exist due to the

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<sup>1</sup> Perceiving EIs as assemblages that emerge as function of temporal-spatial relationships with other factors, both human and non-human, and that emerge from contextual encounters. Interactions and capacities of various facilitating and inhibiting elements (Bhaskar and Garimella, 2017) become dependent upon the emergent properties of the exterior relations between them rather than the mere properties of the parts themselves. Therefore, an AT lens affords the possibility to focus on the non-linear dynamics of objective and subjective constructs and thus broadening our focus to a more holistic interpretation of EI. Arguably, little sense remains in trying to determine the causal influence of any stand alone or independent construct without considering the causal responsibility of the assemblage as a whole.

multi-faceted composition of open systems. It has become clear that EIs are contextually defined and therefore incorporate process. This processual approach has important repercussions on future research, as to accept process is to accept an ontological fluidity in which structure and dynamism can coalesce and, therefore, we must be clear about and recognize the artificial boundary conditions that we are setting.

There have been recent calls to action for the study of cognitive and affectual variables and their interactions (Grégoire et al. 2011; Hayton & Cholakova, 2012; Mitchell et al. 2011). In attending to these calls, we have provided a more holistic interpretation of entrepreneurial behaviour that has incorporated lesser studied intentional antecedents (Douglas et al. 2021). For instance, it was discovered that the ‘heart’ or affective and emotional variables have both exercised and actualized tendencies to alter a given type which supports and furthers recent research efforts focusing on affective states and entrepreneurial motivation (Hayton & Cholakova, 2012; Foo et al. 2009; Shepherd, 2009).

Such affections warrant much greater attention in the study of EIs, as they often operate in advance of consciousness, and can therefore help to explain the origins of precursory beliefs and values (Hayton & Cholakova, 2012). Here we can gain insight from the emotional regulation literature that can inform us as to the most effective methods for an individual to control their emotional states, especially when confronted with what we refer to as *external destabilizers* (Heilman et al. 2010). Interestingly, negative contextual perceptions diminished the impact of other functional parts, such as was observed with social support during the financial downturn that had previously served to ignite a creation intention.

Through demarcating entrepreneurial intending as a journey as opposed to a series of attributes (McMullen & Dimov, 2013) we captured the emergence of five different forms of EI. It is also quite plausible that there exist many more (for example other industry contexts may see an intent toward internationalization) (Douglas et al. 2002). Perceptions of life events can therefore alter the attractiveness of various entrepreneurial options (Brändle & Kukertz, 2021). This provides us reason to suggest that multiple and dynamic EIs are held, and that policy makers and practitioners should be aware of such momentary interactions as they seek to create a more entrepreneurship-oriented society. In corroboration with Hindle's (2004) postulation of temporal fluctuations in the influence of cognitions throughout the process, we have demonstrated that it is useful to acknowledge EI as operating within, what Delanda (2016) termed, a virtual possibility space. Different forms of EI may emerge depending upon multiplicities of heterogeneous ensembles operating across both the micro and macro scales. It is these multiplicities that can determine an individual's propensity to act in a particular way. As we begin to pay more attention to these groups of influencing factors, we can then start to gain further understanding regarding the motivational mixtures that provide conditions more suited to specific forms.

If considered in this manner, and by means of reconceptualization perhaps we should refer to "*entrepreneurial process intentions*" as an all-embracing concept that can account for the dynamism of intent through its delineation into a specific form dependent upon its spatial and temporal location. This parameterization of sort accepts that an individual can hold multiple and dynamic EIs that will correspond to a particular entrepreneurial event(s). Intentions can therefore be considered as functioning through phases, operating within a continuum of hybrid mixtures of expressive (such as affect,

emotive responses, or desires) and material (as in physical bodily processes, physical premises) components.

### **Implications for practice**

The global environment is characterized by uncertainty and change. A purely causal approach to its interpretation is becoming increasingly less plausible. Surprisingly, EIs are often studied from such a linear perspective. Limitations are therefore placed on an integrative understanding that can combine multiple motivations and contextual nuances. Indeed, within different environments, such as across nations or regions, entrepreneurs will be motivated for a range of different causes (Fernandes et al., 2018). These causes are not expected to remain stable throughout time nor location and need to be given careful consideration and tracked accordingly.

For example, international entrepreneurs might be motivated for profit-maximizing reasons (Joardar and Wu, 2011) whereas, within a global context, migrant entrepreneurs (Levie, 2007) and refugee-preneurs (Bizri, 2017) may be pushed rather than pulled into an entrepreneurial career pathway. Such idiosyncratic cases can become overlooked in causative models and merit attention. Shifts towards pro-social motives and a green agenda at a global scale also implore a more fine-grained and contextual outlook towards why one intends to get involved in entrepreneurship.

In doing so, tailored programs at national, regional and local level can be better designed and funded for particular target demographics and cultural settings in efforts to stimulate economic dynamism through entrepreneurial behavior. For instance, in certain contexts – for example those considered less socio-economically developed (Brändle and



Kuckertz, 2021) - there may be refractory periods in which venture creation intention incubates and is therefore delayed. It would be wise for policy makers in this scenario to account for these delays in planning for later entrepreneurship entry. This will ultimately impact on original goals and objectives set and the reporting of results. One potential method to do so is to embrace entrepreneurship as a life-pathway as opposed to the sole creation of a venture, understanding that long-term investment in a more holistic model in the frame of a career journey is needed. An important element will be the capacity for policy makers and educators to manage critical career transition points to ensure individuals are primed to make judgements best suited to their own personal circumstances.

### **Limitations and future research**

In bringing this paper to a close, it is important to acknowledge that this study is not without its limitations, and these should be made clear and sought to be diminished in future research. Firstly, contrary to implicit norms present in many research disciplines, only a single case was used that focused upon highly specific contextual circumstances. This can be problematic when seeking to generalize findings to wider populations. In response, we have attempted to provide rich information of the context of the case and the reason for its selection (i.e., *high levels of access* to the informant operating within an *extreme context* which was studied *longitudinally*). We reiterate that our objective is generalization toward theory, or analytical generalization in the parlance of Yin (2018), in that we do not seek to represent all possible cases yet instead this particular one.

Although statistical generalization is not possible, what is possible and useful is the application of the case findings to different cases, which is common within the practice disciplines such as in law or clinical fields. In this scenario, the researcher would take on

the responsibility of interpretation and understanding, trying to determine generalizability. In other words, deciding whether the characteristics of this case can be applied within different cases representative of alternative (or similar) contexts. It is due to this notion of reader generalizability or transferability, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) put it in their attempts to lessen positivist connotations, that we have sought to provide increased accessibility through an accurate and rich case narrative that can afford future opportunities to ‘fit’ its findings to different contexts. Thus, our hope is that at minimum we have helped to expand the range of possibilities of how the field of EI is interpreted and studied.

This case proves valuable for gaining insight into the relationships between individuals and socially situated variables (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Nonetheless, and although a single-case method remains prominent throughout entrepreneurship literature (Henry & Foss, 2015), perhaps a multiple case study approach with interviews carried out with numerous stakeholders could be considered in future efforts for comparisons and clarifications (Eisenhardt, 1989). This will also help to alleviate the disadvantage of only having a single interviewee.

Secondly, intentions involve both inner and outer processes that are difficult to identify or to collect empirically. The use of interviews allows for the extraction of information regarding an individual’s intent, which relies both on retrospective and real-time data collection. This reliance on verbalization of thoughts does have several potential drawbacks, as individuals may suffer from various biases through either conformance responses, or simply through forgetting various pieces of information. It is, however, suggested that retrospective accounts do allow the qualitative researcher to usefully encounter rationale behind participant thinking (Cloutier & Langley, 2020)

Related to this and given that the research relies heavily upon retrospective accounts, the likelihood of the participant seeking to find logic in their own responses is increased, and, therefore, errors may have occurred. This is partially addressed using a triangulation of methods that helps to support given statements, and to reveal previously unencountered data. Future research might consider further integration of various tools from those disciplines more versed in case study protocol such as the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative techniques, or simulation approaches for greater comprehensiveness (Davis et al. 2007; Shah & Corley, 2006).

Building on the core findings that have been discovered in the current case several future research avenues are opened that are considered well suited to higher level abstractions in the hope of generating a better, more contextualized, and wide-spanning theory of how EIs evolve. In Addition to creating a taxonomy of entrepreneurial process intention types, recommendations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Identifying destabilizing factors and their influence across different entrepreneurial process intention types. For example, EIs based on a strong social cause given their strong levels of associated passion and personal attachment may have a higher intentional threshold for change than one described as more lifestyle oriented. Furthermore, high-growth intentions and those that are technologically grounded operate in a very dynamic and fast-paced environment with large amounts of unpredictable external regulation. Therefore, we may see more frequent and unexpected shocks within these contexts as opposed to less turbulent markets such as agri-entrepreneurship intention (Banerjee et al., 2020). Thresholds would also be expected to differ for those individuals with higher

levels of psychological capital as they are taken to be better able to cope with such external (and internal) disruptions more effectively.

- Identifying the processes of how intentional assemblages are re-stabilized under specific environmental conditions and how re-stabilization/belief re-alignment influences the entrepreneur's future motivational beliefs, value perceptions and reaction (or proactiveness) towards external triggers.
- Examining and classifying intentional triggers, both internal and externally derived, in terms of their boundary altering capacities as either constructive (intentional enhancing/re-stabilizing) or destructive (intentional destroying) ways. This will most likely be conditioned by discrepancies between current beliefs and lived experiences. The higher the discrepancy the larger the expected conflict that can lead to more negative consequences such as exit or inaction.
- Determining the role of social norms in stabilizing or disrupting an intentional assemblage. More specifically, in what situations do the values held (and exposed) by significant others either enable or constrain an intentional form? As witnessed in the current case, the influence of social norms can be lessened by other assemblage components. Therefore, we need to gain more information into how this process unfolds and the undergirding mechanism at play.
- Examining the effectual actions of entrepreneurs and how these align with the formation of an intentional assemblage and its disruption thereafter. For example, the entrepreneur will be dealing with several unknowns and as they progress along their entrepreneurial journey new pathways and directions will be opened. Entrepreneurs are constantly exploring new sources of knowledge to co-create their future under the premise of affordable loss (Sarasvathy, 2001). The question

follows, do these learning events and feedback loops coincide with the stabilization and de-stabilization of intentional forms? If so, how does the extension and refinement of entrepreneurial resources under a ‘crazy quilt’ mentality impact the type and nature of the entrepreneurship process intention that ensues? As goals change, what impact does this have on our underlying motivational - and thus intentional - beliefs?

### **Summary**

In summary, as we search for a coherent foundation that can instill integrity to the EI research domain, the ontological stance of AT has emerged as one with great potential. Its application has made us realize that it is no longer sufficient to speak of EI as an isolated entity. A definitional obscurity can result insofar as what specific form of EI are we dealing with exactly? Such indiscriminate practice only serves to confound an opacity and fragmented use of the concept that puts at risk its utility and value (Thompson, 2009). Having taken intentionality beyond the confines of study ‘across’ the entrepreneurial journey toward study ‘within’ its events, we feel that EI research has been advanced.

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Table 1. Interview timeline. Prepared by the authors.

<b>Month</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Interview Number</b>	<b>Main Topic Covered*</b>	<b>Sources of Additional Support</b>
June	2012	1	Demographics, background and entrepreneurial journey	Photo evidence
May	2013	2	Career path and family influence	Informal discussions with family members
June	2014	3	Attitude towards entrepreneurship	Informal discussions with family members
January	2015	4	Entrepreneurial ability and learning	Informal discussions with family members
July	2015	5	Company growth and expansion	Internal company documents and photo evidence
January	2016	6	Impact of financial downturn on company behavior and operations	Industry reports, internal company documents, informal discussions with family members and employees
April	2016	7	Decision making process - exit	NA
August	2016	8	Psychological impact of the financial downturn	Informal discussions with family members
January	2017	9	Reflections on the entrepreneur's current situation	NA
July	2017	10	Decision making process – re-entry	Informal discussions with family members
December	2017	11	Company operations and attitude towards entrepreneurship	Industry reports and internal company documents
May	2018	12	Reflections on the entrepreneurial journey	NA

\*Representative of the predominant topic covered in the interview. Some topics were discussed across multiple interviews.



Table 2. Case analysis, emerging concepts and sense-making. Prepared by the authors.

Key Event	Representative First Order Quotes	Contributing Storyline	Second Order Theme
<i>Direct Experience</i>	<p>“I had a strong desire to work with my father and get paid, this is what I chose to do”.</p> <p>“[...] I realized that the formal educational system was not for me although I enjoyed learning I wanted to gain actual work experience as soon as possible, this was the most important learning for me”</p> <p>“[...] deep down I always had a positive view of working and knew I would leave school at a young age; it was normal in those times”</p> <p>“[...] these tasks provided the necessary, although sometimes not pretty, experiences to learn”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The entrepreneur’s father co-created a business venture in the construction industry during the 1960’s</li> <li>• He attended primary school, but an overwhelming disdain for all that was academic and an affinity toward working with his father saw him discontinue his studies before entry into what at the time was equivalent to secondary level education</li> <li>• At the age of thirteen he opted to serve as a construction worker</li> <li>• A preference was developed for paid employment whereby the importance of accumulating both individual and social capital was noted</li> <li>• The entrepreneur was beginning to advance the capacity for entrepreneurship at a dilettante level</li> </ul>	<i>Paid Employment Intention</i>
<i>External Shock #1</i>	<p>“Yes, at this moment I had a strong willingness, or intention, to create my own business”</p> <p>“I said to myself that you have developed all the skills you need to do it yourself so maybe now is the right time”</p> <p>“[...] do I continue working for someone else who I don’t know, or do I try to go it alone?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 1985 his father decided to sell the business due to personal reasons</li> <li>• The entrepreneur faced a dilemma that required a great deal of reflection</li> <li>• A potential gap in the market (the need for housing restorations) had already been identified, and in the end, based upon the belief that he had the necessary skills and capabilities, the decision was taken to exploit this</li> <li>• The decision was strongly encouraged by co-workers and family, with the economic climate at the time very welcoming toward new enterprises</li> <li>• Within a month from the first indication of intent to create the business the first customer had been secured and served</li> <li>• This accomplishment was one that reinforced a strong commitment to making the business creation process a success</li> </ul>	<i>Business Creation Intention</i>

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“[...] if circumstances were different, I am sure that I would not have made the transition; everything appeared to fit into place, from getting financial support to the psychological support offered by my family and friends”

“[...] at this moment, my perseverance had paid off. I realized that the business was feasible, that my perceptions matched reality, and for me this is when my business was officially created”

“I knew this was not a signal of my success, but it did show me that it could work and from this I could create a manageable business, which was my ultimate goal at the time”

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“I never thought of anything else than continuing within the business. I had a strong willingness to keep going”

“[...] it is just something that appeared to happen, we did not plan for it, and it was almost happening sub-consciously”

“[...] business growth surpassed my expectations, the company grew to around 100 people, imagine that who what have thought from the start”

“I had developed contacts and business came from a lot of these. Even when meetings were not planned, I would still meet individuals that offered me contracting projects and of substantial size”

- Between 1986 and 2007 the business continued to grow and the number of employees and facilities increased
- This was not in the entrepreneur’s original plans, and it appeared that little rational forethought or ambition preceded this evolution
- Chance meetings with various stakeholders led to the opportunity to substantially grow the business
- In this epoch favorable access to external finance was marked as a key exogenous facilitator
- Personal limitations were acknowledged which led to the development of more managerially oriented skills
- It was described as a “stable situation”
- The entrepreneur believed that there was no better alternative than to continue what he was doing
- This period was further supported by a positive attitude toward the industry and the progress the venture was making

*Continuance  
Intention*

***Business  
Growth***

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“[...] To improve and remain competitive we needed to educate ourselves. At this point I hired specialists to optimize the business processes and I also tried to develop my own managerial skills”

“The business was becoming stabilized, and the external environment was very friendly”

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“I just wanted to get out”

“[...] if they could not have predicted what was to come, how could I have any chance?”

“[...] it was a moment that I don't like to relive. I was overwhelmed with emotion, and above all, fear and anger. Anxiety also started to set in as I began to seriously question my desire to be an entrepreneur”

***External Shock #2***

“I wasn't sure if I had the ability to carry out my job anymore. Was it really for me? Things were no longer working out the way they were before, honestly, I began to question myself”

“Everyone disappeared, the contacts I had generated had vanished, resources were no longer there. Everybody was looking out for themselves which is normal really [...]”

“My close friends and family continued in their strong support and for that I am truly thankful”

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- In August 2007, distress signals began to amplify in the financial markets
- The entrepreneur in these moments was in a state of disbelief
- It was clearly an emotive time that had a severe impact on morale with a protectionist environment had emerging
- Events contributed to lower self-confidence and diminished perceptions of feasibility
- External barriers posed from uncondusive environmental conditions led to increased self-doubt
- Family support remained steadfast, but this was not sufficient to maintain commitment
- A decision to sell the business was made in late 2010
- The entrepreneur's reflections on this decision were fraught with negative emotions
- Eventually, this led to him exiting the entrepreneurship process

*Exit Intention*

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“[...] at this moment I can confirm that I have a strong intention to re-enter the industry and create another company”

“I thought, was it better to try something completely new or do what I know and what I am good at. I chose the second option and yes you could say out of necessity and the fact there were no other options”

“What a learning experience, looking back to where I was and where I am currently is worlds apart. I know that I have the ability, my experience has shown this. Why I ever questioned myself I will never know. I have an underlying passion for the industry”

“[...] having spent long periods of time contemplating what my next move was to be, I finally realized that these events were simply a new period of learning in my life, just as my time working for my father had been [...]”

“Yes, the changing climate has had a very big effect on the way I think, I am much more positive and optimistic about the future”

- The time from 2011-2012 was one of deep self-reflection that was burdened by a mixture of moods, feelings and affective states
- Based on his “underlying passion” and the fact that there were “no other options” a re-entry intention was born.
- This intention was supported by previously accumulated knowledge and experience
- Social infrastructure and an improving economic environment helped in the creation and discovery of new opportunities
- A clear change in mindset occurred within the entrepreneur based on positivity and self-worth

*Re-entry  
Intention*

**Reflection\***

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\*Real-time tracking commenced during this stage

Figure 1. A schematic overview of Delanda's (2006) Assemblage Theory used as a framework in the current study. Prepared by the authors.

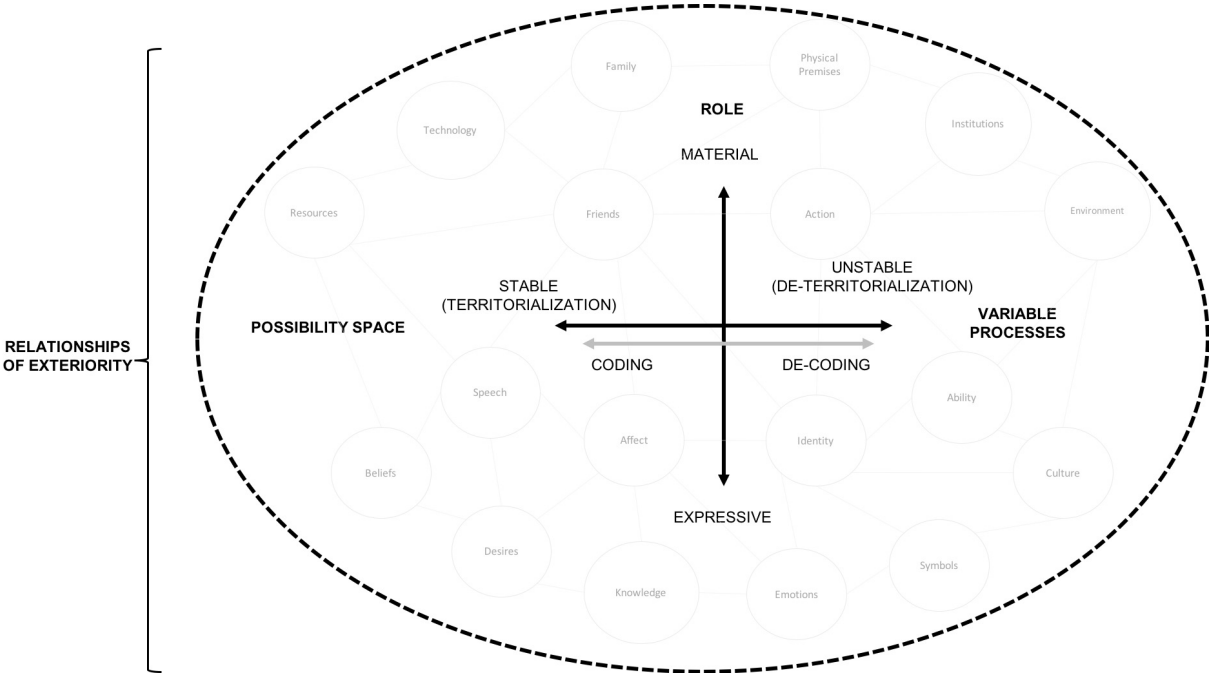


Figure 2. The emergence of multiple intentions in the current case: assemblages of cognitive, social, and contextually situated factors. Prepared by the authors.

