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Support paths: the relational context that enables social support to entrepreneurs

Sean White

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THÈSE

Pour obtenir le grade de

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Présentée par

Sean WHITE

Thèse dirigée par **Gazi ISLAM** et
codirigée par **Barthelemy CHOLLET**

préparée au sein du **Laboratoire IREGE**
dans **l'École Doctorale SISEO**

Les voies du soutien : le contexte relationnel qui favorise le soutien social aux entrepreneurs

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devant le jury composé de :

Monsieur Vincent CHAUVET

Professeur des universités, Université de Toulon (Suffragant)

Monsieur Barthelemy CHOLLET

Professeur, Grenoble École de Management (Co-Directeur de la recherche)

Madame Véronique FAVRE-BONTE

Professeur des universités, Université Savoie Mont Blanc (Suffragante)

Monsieur Olivier GERMAIN

Professeur, Université du Québec à Montréal (Rapporteur)

Monsieur Gazi ISLAM

Professeur, Grenoble École de Management (Co-Directeur de la recherche)

Madame Nicola MIRC

Professeur des universités, Université de Toulouse (Rapporteuse)

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Résumé étendu en français

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.0 SOUTENIR LES ENTREPRENEURS

Prenons l'exemple d'un entrepreneur qui développe un projet et en parle autour de lui. Ses interlocuteurs sont alors confrontés à une décision : dois-je soutenir ou non l'entrepreneur et son projet ? Pour répondre à cette question, il est nécessaire de réfléchir à une autre question, légèrement différente : que puis-je faire pour l'entrepreneur ? En effet, si la personne pense pouvoir identifier quelque chose en réponse à cette question, alors il y a de fortes chances pour qu'elle soutienne l'entrepreneur. Un aidant est défini comme une personne qui « donne délibérément accès à une ressource précieuse pour l'entrepreneur » (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007 : 607). L'entrepreneur et l'aidant seront par la suite amenés à négocier au cours de leurs interactions l'aide et le soutien qui pourront être apportés par l'aidant à l'entrepreneur et à son projet. Selon les principes de la sociologie relationnelle, les actions du soutien seront circonscrites et rendues possibles par un réseau d'interactions allant au-delà de la relation immédiate (Dubini & Aldrich, 1991 ; Emirbayer & Mishe, 1998 ; Spigel, 2017). Aussi, cette recherche part de l'hypothèse que *ce qui peut être fait volontairement par l'aidant pour l'entrepreneur dépend tout autant de la relation qu'entretiennent*

l'aidant et l'entrepreneur que des autres relations qui entourent l'aidant. En effet, l'ensemble de ces relations définissent les ressources auxquelles l'aidant peut accéder, mais également les normes et les attentes auxquelles ce dernier doit faire face. La principale question à laquelle cette thèse souhaite répondre est la suivante : *pourquoi les aidants soutiennent-ils volontairement les entrepreneurs et leurs projets ?*

Ce travail de recherche suit le courant de pensées établi par Birley (1985) et Aldrich et Zimmer (1986), qui suggère que les entrepreneurs agissent dans un réseau de relations (Chabaud & Sammut, 2016 ; voir également Hoang & Yi, 2015 ; ainsi que Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010 pour une revue de la littérature). Cette littérature est particulièrement riche en ce qui concerne la manière dont les ressources parviennent aux entrepreneurs par le biais de leurs relations sociales (Podolny, 2001), ainsi que la façon dont le réseau environnant contraint ou favorise les actions des entrepreneurs et l'utilisation des ressources (Uzzi, 1996, 1997). En revanche, cette littérature ne permet pas de comprendre l'expérience de ces relations vécues par les entrepreneurs et leurs aidants (Hwang & Colyvas, 2020 ; Jack, 2010). À l'inverse de ce courant de littérature, l'analyse des réseaux sociaux permet de détailler les mécanismes qui guident l'interaction des acteurs au fur et à mesure que le réseau prend forme (Fuhse, 2015a ; Mische, 2014 ; White, 2008). Cela implique d'observer à la fois la structure des relations (Jack, Moulton, Anderson, & Dodd, 2010) et les sens que les acteurs attribuent à cette structure (Lounsbury, Gehman, & Glynn, 2019 ; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019). Si une certaine convergence des structures de relations avec les « domaines de sens » a été observée dans plusieurs contextes, tels que les mouvements étudiants (Mische, 1997, 2008), les initiatives anti-esclavagistes (Sheller, 2000), les tours de contrôle des avions (Tilly, 2006), le bien-être au travail (Krinsky, 2007), ou encore les transformations historiques de l'Opéra de Paris (Johnson, 2007), il reste cependant à les décortiquer empiriquement en tant que processus relationnels (Spigel, 2017 ; Spigel & Harrison, 2018). Cette recherche propose d'observer comment les sens des relations entre les aidants influent sur la manière dont ils soutiennent les entrepreneurs.

Une telle étude contribue au domaine de l'entrepreneuriat en apportant une meilleure compréhension de la manière dont les liens sociaux par lesquels les ressources sont acheminées vers l'entrepreneur sont établis et maintenus.

Pour décortiquer le phénomène du soutien apporté aux entrepreneurs, cette thèse explore les fondements relationnels qui constituent les efforts de soutien en faveur des entrepreneurs faisant face aux défis de l'entrepreneuriat (Baron, Franklin, & Hmieleski, 2016 ; Rauch, Fink, & Hatak, 2018 ; Wincent & Örtqvist, 2009). Plutôt que de considérer les relations de réseau uniquement comme des canaux d'échanges par lesquels transitent des ressources (Podolny, 2001), cette thèse propose de les aborder comme des contextes sociaux dans lesquels les défis des entrepreneurs peuvent être relevés par des actions qui reconfigurent ces contextes (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007 ; Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010 ; Steyaert & van Looy, 2010). Ainsi, le phénomène est-il étudié comme un domaine de convergence entre les réseaux et le contexte social dans lequel s'inscrivent à la fois l'aidant et l'entrepreneur, et dans lequel le soutien aux entrepreneurs a du sens.

.1 STRUCTURE DU SOUTIEN EN TANT QUE CONSTRUCTION

RELATIONNELLE

.1.1 Echanges sociaux

Les relations des entrepreneurs avec des aidants sont cruciales pour la survie de leur entreprise (Davidsson & Honig, 2003 ; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). Par exemple, Vissa et Chacar (2009) soulignent que les relations qu'entretiennent les entrepreneurs peuvent compléter et améliorer leurs compétences et leurs connaissances. Kotha et George (2012) ont montré que les types de relations directes que les entrepreneurs entretiennent dans leur propre réseau permettent de prédire le type de ressources qu'ils reçoivent. Ceux qui démarrent leur entreprise accèdent à des ressources vitales grâce à des liens personnels (Birley, 1985 ; Hite & Hesterly, 2001 ; Kotha &

George, 2012), c'est-à-dire des relations avec des aidants (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007 ; Kim, Longest, & Aldrich, 2013 ; Newbert & Tornikoski, 2012 ; Newbert, Tornikoski, & Quigley, 2013).

Hanlon et Saunders (2007: 607) soulignent que les aidants soutiennent « volontairement » les entrepreneurs, ce qui amène naturellement à s'interroger sur ce qui explique cette implication délibérée des aidants dans l'avancement des projets des entrepreneurs. La réponse la plus évidente est que les aidants ont tout intérêt à le faire. Une façon claire de rendre cet avantage tangible est de supposer que le soutien est apporté dans le cadre d'un échange financier. L'idée d'un soutien avec une contrepartie financière est ainsi poussée à l'extrême par Leyden, Link, et Siegel (2014) qui développent un modèle dans lequel les entrepreneurs « achètent » des liens, dépensant en fait des ressources financières pour former leur réseau.

L'accent mis sur les relations de soutien entre entrepreneurs et aidants en tant que simple source de ressources tangibles est trompeur car il limite l'analyse à de simples échanges économiques entre les acteurs (Jones, Hesterly, & Borgatti, 1997). L'essence même de l'entrepreneuriat est bien plus vaste et ne se restreint pas qu'à des échanges économiques. Entreprendre implique d'initier et de maintenir des relations entre les êtres humains, de développer une culture commune et de partager des affects (Garud, Gehman, & Giuliani, 2014 ; Germain, 2017 ; Goss & Sadler-Smith, 2018 ; Steyaert & Katz, 2004). Par exemple, compte tenu des situations incertaines et troublantes inhérentes au processus entrepreneurial (Byrne & Shepherd, 2015 ; Mathias, Williams, & Smith, 2015 ; Shepherd, McMullen, & Jennings, 2007), le soutien émotionnel est de la plus haute importance pour les entrepreneurs (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007). Si certaines formes de soutien relèvent clairement de l'échange économique, comme la remise de fonds par un investisseur en échange de rendements futurs, d'autres ne sont pas aussi simples, comme le fait d'offrir gratuitement des conseils, de donner du temps personnel pour apporter un soutien émotionnel ou de proposer gracieusement des ressources. En résumé, l'apport d'un soutien n'est souvent pas une question de simples échanges économiques où l'entrepreneur « achète » un

soutien, mais semble plutôt émerger de l'identification d'un besoin de l'entrepreneur par l'aidant associée à l'intérêt de l'aidant à répondre à ces besoins par un soutien (Goss & Sadler-Smith, 2018 ; Huang & Knight, 2017). Aussi, les échanges économiques sont considérés comme l'une des configurations possibles, au même titre que d'autres échanges relationnels qui peuvent être observés dans le phénomène du soutien aux entrepreneurs.

.1.2 Relations indirectes

L'essentiel de cette thèse s'appuie sur l'intuition qu'une partie des spécificités des relations de soutien peut être comprise en élargissant le champ de recherche pour inclure les relations au-delà du lien direct. Il s'agit de considérer les liens entre les tierces parties et les aidants comme un complément de ceux qui existent entre les entrepreneurs et les aidants. En d'autres termes, cette thèse étudie la combinaison de liens direct et indirect, appelée « *voie de soutien* ». Vanacker, Manigart, et Meuleman (2014) constatent que les voies de relations—la combinaison de liens directs et indirects reliant un acteur à un autre au sein d'un réseau—fonctionnent comme une « colle » qui rassemble le réseau, donnant accès à différents « réservoirs » de soutien. Anderson, Park, et Jack (2007) affirment que ce portefeuille de contacts est la « clé » permettant aux entrepreneurs d'accéder aux ressources et attirent l'attention sur les personnes qui, autour des entrepreneurs, leur donnent accès au réseau plus large. Certains travaux montrent que les entrepreneurs devraient avoir un mélange de niveaux d'interaction élevés et faibles avec leurs aidants pour obtenir des ressources de manière optimale (Davidsson & Honig, 2003 ; Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013). Il y a cependant un écueil dans ces résultats : quel que soit le réseau de l'entrepreneur et son niveau d'interaction avec les aidants, ces derniers ne peuvent apporter un soutien que dans la limite de leurs possibilités. Le projet de l'entrepreneur peut souffrir lorsque le soutien est sollicité auprès d'aidants qui, malgré leur disponibilité, ne sont pas en mesure d'apporter le soutien demandé (Kim et al., 2013). A l'instar des entrepreneurs qui mobilisent les aidants pour

obtenir le soutien dont ils ont besoin, les aidants peuvent également compter sur leur propre réseau pour les guider. Les liens indirects (entre les aidants et des personnes tierces), associés au lien direct (entre les entrepreneurs et les aidants), créent un cadre dans lequel un soutien précieux peut émerger. En d'autres termes, si les relations autour des entrepreneurs circonscrivent et favorisent leurs actions en tant qu'acteurs sociaux (Anderson & Miller, 2003 ; Hite, 2005 ; Hite & Hesterly, 2001 ; Jack & Anderson, 2002 ; Larson, 1992 ; McKeever, Jack, & Anderson, 2015), il devrait en être de même pour les aidants et leurs propres relations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998 ; Jack & Anderson, 2002 ; Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010). Cela a été considéré de manière implicite dans l'étude du flux des ressources de connaissances dans les réseaux d'entrepreneurs. Des recherches mettent en évidence l'importance, pour obtenir de nouvelles ressources et connaissances, des trous structurels—c'est-à-dire d'un réseau composé de personnes qui ne sont elles-mêmes pas connectées entre elles (par exemple, Chollet, Géraudel, & Mothe, 2014 ; Leyden et al., 2014 ; Semrau & Werner, 2014 ; Tan, Zhang, & Wang, 2015), de la distance dans le réseau—c'est-à-dire le nombre de liens nécessaires pour atteindre un décideur particulier (Jääskeläinen & Maula, 2014), et de la centralité—c'est-à-dire le fait d'être au cœur d'un réseau (Hermans, Van Apeldoorn, Stuiver, & Kok, 2013). Tous ces résultats soulignent que l'acquisition de connaissances par les entrepreneurs par le biais de conseils dépend de questions plus complexes que le simple fait d'avoir des liens directs avec leurs aidants.

Cette thèse s'intéresse à la manière dont les entrepreneurs peuvent obtenir du soutien de la part de leurs aidants. Il est toutefois possible de modifier la perspective et de se demander pourquoi cela fait sens pour un aidant de venir en aide à un entrepreneur. En adoptant ainsi le point de vue de l'aidant, il est possible d'élargir la question pour comprendre comment le soutien est façonné par les relations que l'aidant entretient à la fois avec l'entrepreneur et avec des personnes tierces. Cette question est traitée en considérant le soutien comme quelque chose qui émerge des pratiques relationnelles de l'entrepreneur et de l'aidant avec leur réseau. Au lieu de discuter de la manière

dont le soutien est extrait d'un réseau ayant une structure donnée, cette thèse discute de la manière dont le soutien émerge parmi les relations. De cette façon, il est possible de comprendre comment un aidant accepte de faire partie du réseau de l'entrepreneur au départ, et pourquoi un aidant particulier n'est disposé à apporter que certaines formes de soutien, et pas nécessairement d'autres.

.1.3 Culture

Au-delà de la structure de réseau qui lie les entrepreneurs et les aidants, il est essentiel de s'intéresser plus en détail à leurs relations afin de comprendre pourquoi les aidants participent au réseau de l'entrepreneur et acceptent cette position d'aidant. En posant cette question, cette thèse propose que le soutien n'est pas simplement le résultat d'efforts des entrepreneurs pour construire un réseau avec certaines caractéristiques et dans lequel les individus donnent accès à des ressources, mais est également le fait de l'effort des aidants. Les aidants construisent ce lien de soutien avec tout autant d'effort et d'intérêt que l'entrepreneur qu'a besoin de ce soutien.

Une littérature parallèle sur l'entrepreneuriat a exploré la dimension relationnelle inhérente au processus d'organisation, sans toutefois accorder autant d'attention à la structure des relations dans l'ensemble du réseau (par exemple, Anderson, Dodd, & Jack, 2012 ; Garud et al., 2014 ; Hjorth & Holt, 2016 ; Steyaert & Katz, 2004). Dans un travail de synthèse, Steyaert et van Looy (2010) discutent de l'importance des pratiques relationnelles entre les personnes et de l'engagement des individus dans la relation pour permettre d'organiser des efforts communs. Cette littérature s'attache à mettre l'accent sur l'individu et l'importance de la collaboration dans des situations quotidiennes et ordinaires. Cette approche souligne à la fois l'expérience affective des personnes et leur vécu commun dans un contexte local, culturel et historique spécifique. Cette approche est complémentaire de l'approche plus structuraliste présentée précédemment dans la mesure où elle approfondit la multiplicité des sens qui sont vécus dans les relations, tout en gardant à l'esprit le contexte plus large dans lequel les interactions prennent place.

La littérature existante sur le soutien s'est le plus souvent penchée sur la force ou la faiblesse des relations en question. Suivant la définition classique de Granovetter (1973), la force d'une relation est décrite, d'une part, dans la réciprocité des actions, l'intensité et la fréquence des interactions entre deux individus et, d'autre part, dans la présence ou non d'interaction entre l'ensemble des acteurs du réseau. Bien que cette dimension soit souvent négligée dans la littérature sur les réseaux et l'entrepreneuriat, la dimension relationnelle est imprégnée de sens (Mische & White, 1998 ; White, 1995). Au cours d'interactions avec d'autres acteurs, chaque individu fait l'expérience du sens de ces relations, des termes de la relation, de ce dont ils discutent et problématisent en étant en relation les uns avec les autres. Aussi, le sens apparaît comme le lien entre des éléments d'information. Par exemple, la juxtaposition entre les éléments "art", "livre" et "étagère" renvoie à l'image d'un "livre d'art sur une étagère", qui est plus que la somme de ces éléments et évoque d'autres associations, telles que des émotions et des histoires possibles. Ces sens permettent aux relations de devenir dynamiques dans la façon dont les gens comprennent les termes de leurs interactions, l'intensité avec laquelle l'interaction a lieu et si elles sont plus ou moins fréquentes (White, 2008). Lounsbury et al. (2019) ont récemment souligné que les entrepreneurs engagent leurs collaborateurs dans un processus de nature intrinsèquement culturelle plutôt qu'économique, réitérant ainsi la vision profonde de la connectivité comme paradigme de l'entrepreneuriat, comme cela a été précédemment mis en avant par Anderson et al. (2012) ainsi que Steyaert et Katz (2004). Dire d'une relation qu'elle est relation de soutien, c'est intégrer la notion de support comme un sens qui imprègne cette relation. Ce sens est à la base de l'élaboration du soutien qui est apporté par l'aidant à l'entrepreneur, et des conditions dans lesquelles ce soutien est assuré (Garud et al., 2014).

Cette thèse propose d'observer comment les relations d'un aidant façonnent sa réponse aux besoins de soutien d'un entrepreneur. Si les méthodes quantitatives ont été utiles pour identifier les structures des relations dans un réseau associées à des résultats spécifiques tels que des idées

novatrices (Burt, 2004), la survie de l'entreprise (Uzzi, 1997), ou encore l'acquisition d'une réputation pour le produit et l'entrepreneur (Podolny, 2001), les méthodes qualitatives sont plus adaptées pour explorer les hypothèses sous-jacentes qui guident ces études (Ibarra, Kilduff, & Tsai, 2005 ; Jack, 2010), comme le pouvoir directif des relations (McKeever et al., 2015), la pression exercée par la participation à certains groupes (Krackhardt, 1999), l'activation de liens forts et faibles pour obtenir un soutien (Jack, 2005), les moyens par lesquels les entrepreneurs s'intègrent pour atteindre des performances supérieures à celles du marché (Uzzi, 1996), ou encore les microprocessus sociaux d'intégration des personnes dans les processus entrepreneuriaux (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010 ; Obstfeld, 2005), pour n'en citer que quelques-uns. Dans ces études qualitatives, la question du sens articulé dans ces relations peut être explorée en tant que mécanisme sous-jacent qui explique pourquoi certaines structures de réseau ou certaines forces de lien fonctionnent d'une certaine manière. La question clé est ici de savoir comment ces relations articulent toutes sortes d'interactions différentes entre les acteurs qui peuvent façonner le soutien apporté aux entrepreneurs (Lounsbury et al., 2019 ; Überbacher, Jacobs, & Cornelissen, 2015 ; Zott & Huy, 2007).

.2 DESIGN DE LA RECHERCHE

.2.1 Le positionnement épistémologique de la thèse

Alors que la littérature existante a montré l'importance des efforts déployés par les entrepreneurs pour intégrer l'aidant dans leur réseau de liens directs afin d'améliorer l'accès à de précieuses relations favorisant les échanges de support (par exemple, Huang et Knight, 2017 ; Jack, 2005 ; Newbert *et al.*, 2013 ; Vissa et Chacar, 2009), cette thèse se tourne vers le point de vue des aidants en considérant leurs propres réseaux personnels et la manière dont leurs relations peut favoriser le soutien au entrepreneur.

Dans les recherches décrites ici, la structure des relations est considérée comme imbriquée dans la réalité objective qui contraint et encadre l'action (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Par conséquent, il est présumé qu'il existe une structure sociale « à l'extérieur » où les acteurs circulent et interagissent les uns avec les autres. Cela permet une vision *copernicienne* des relations, une vision où la structure globale est observée sans qu'aucun point d'observation ne soit placé dans le système, l'observateur restant distant et, pratiquement, omniscient (Jack, 2010). En ce sens, le chercheur est conscient du phénomène et tente de reconstruire cette vision copernicienne du monde social, alors que les informateurs qui sont pris dans le phénomène (ici, les entrepreneurs et ses aidants) ne le sont pas (Schütz, 1970). Cela implique que les actions de soutien découlent de réseaux de relations entre acteurs qui dépassent l'expérience d'un acteur particulier. Le chercheur, guidé par la connaissance de la théorie existante, est en mesure de naviguer dans la complexité de ces structures et de trouver leur relation avec des actions particulières dans le phénomène de soutien aux entrepreneurs. Souvent, ces vues sont obtenues par des mesures des interactions au sein des structures sociales (Borgatti, Brass, & Halgin, 2014 ; Kilduff & Brass, 2010).

Cependant, Porter et Woo (2015) postulent que l'interaction des acteurs permet de comprendre le réseau dans lequel ils se trouvent. Cette compréhension constitue donc la base de l'échange de ressources dans leur relation. Il est important de souligner que, dans cette perspective, les décisions concernant le transfert et la réception de ressources, ainsi que le maintien ou non du lien, émergent de la rencontre des deux acteurs, plutôt que de se produire a priori. Les interactions futures au sein du réseau sont préparées à partir de l'expérience du réseau qui émerge de l'interaction de ces acteurs ; c'est-à-dire l'aidant avec l'entrepreneur et l'aidant avec les autres acteurs. Cette thèse observe comment l'aidant décrit ses liens avec l'entrepreneur ou avec d'autres contacts. Bien que cette thèse parte de l'hypothèse d'un contexte objectif de relations, ces investigations cherchent à éclairer la manière dont les individus lui donnent un sens, naviguent, et négocient leurs positions entre les relations. Ici, nous approfondissons ce que Jack (2010) appelle

la vision *ptoléméenne* du réseau, où le point de vue d'un acteur particulier est utilisé comme « centre ». En ce sens, c'est l'informateur, et non le spécialiste en sciences sociales, qui est au courant du phénomène social en question (Schütz, 1970). Cela implique que les connaissances du chercheur sont loin d'être parfaites et suffisantes, et nécessitent d'être complétées par des pièces de puzzle détenues par les acteurs qui sont parties prenantes du phénomène étudié. Alors que le point de vue présenté précédemment est souvent développé par des méthodes quantitatives, l'ignorance du chercheur et la vision privilégiée qu'ont les agents de leur propre expérience au sein de cette structure impliquent l'utilisation d'approches qualitatives et phénoménologiques des réseaux. En effet, de telles approches peuvent apporter une meilleure compréhension de la signification des réseaux, et par conséquent permettre d'approfondir les recherches sur la structure relationnelle globale (Herz, Peters, & Truschkat, 2014 ; Ibarra et al., 2005 ; White, 2008).

Cette thèse adopte cette dernière approche, l'approche ptoléméenne, comme point de vue pour étudier les réseaux de soutien. Les chapitres III et IV étudient les triades d'acteurs dans les réseaux de soutien. Les triades sont la structure fondamentale des réseaux par laquelle la complexité commence à influencer sur les actions et la formation des relations (Bianchi, Casnici, & Squazzoni, 2018 ; Brennecke & Rank, 2016 ; Krackhardt, 1999). L'originalité de notre travail est de prendre à rebours l'approche méthodologique traditionnelle, consistant à étudier de manière quantitative un très grand nombre de triades. Il s'agit, ici, au contraire, d'étudier de manière approfondie un nombre restreint de cas (Siggelkow, 2007), en réunissant pour chaque cas les informations venant de plusieurs sources. Cette approche réduit évidemment la possibilité de généraliser les résultats, mais c'est selon nous le seul moyen de faire émerger certains phénomènes non identifiés jusqu'alors, et, *in fine*, d'apporter une contribution à la littérature sur le soutien social aux entrepreneurs (Cope, 2005 ; Hite, 2005 ; Islam, 2015).

.2.2 Les choix méthodologiques de collecte et d'analyse des données

Pour discuter l'expérience de soutenir et d'être soutenu, les recherches menées dans le cadre de cette thèse s'intéressent à la compréhension des conversations que les entrepreneurs ont avec leurs aidants. Tout d'abord, en utilisant des données d'entretiens, ces travaux permettent de comprendre les valeurs et les préoccupations en jeu au moment où les entrepreneurs et leurs aidants négocient leurs positions dans la relation. Cependant, les entretiens avec ces acteurs du réseau ne sont que des portraits des échanges qui se sont réellement produits. En raison de cette limitation, les investigations s'appuient également sur des observations ethnographiques, utilisées implicitement au cours des entretiens analysés dans les chapitres III et IV, puis pleinement développées dans le chapitre V. Un des intérêts de ce travail est de permettre d'identifier et d'étudier les moments où l'entrepreneur et l'aidant semblent partir dans des directions opposées, ainsi que la façon dont ils sont capables de surmonter ces situations. De cette façon, cette thèse permet de reconnaître les sens émergents dans la relation, tout en prenant en compte la réalité objective (structurel) de la conversation et des interactions entre les acteurs. Au travers de ces investigations, le chercheur participe ainsi pleinement à un phénomène de changement et de résistance. Bien que les données des entretiens soient transversales, les personnes interrogées fournissent des récits qui décrivent le déroulement des relations de soutien, donnant un aperçu de la façon dont le réseau se déploie. Cela contribue donc à poser les bases d'une vision processuelle du développement du réseau autour des entrepreneurs et de leurs projets, décrite dans le chapitre de conclusion (VI) (Lamine, Jack, Fayolle, & Chabaud, 2015).

Les trois études empiriques présentées dans cette thèse suivent la voie phénoménologique et interprétativiste (Cope, 2005 ; Germain & Laifi, 2018 ; Jack, 2010 ; Karataş-Özkan, Anderson, Fayolle, Howells, & Condor, 2014), adoptant le modèle d'études telles que Byrne et Shepherd (2015), Cope (2011), et McKeever et al. (2015). Ce choix se justifie par la richesse que de telles études ont démontré en apportant un éclairage sur les défis émotionnels et informationnels des

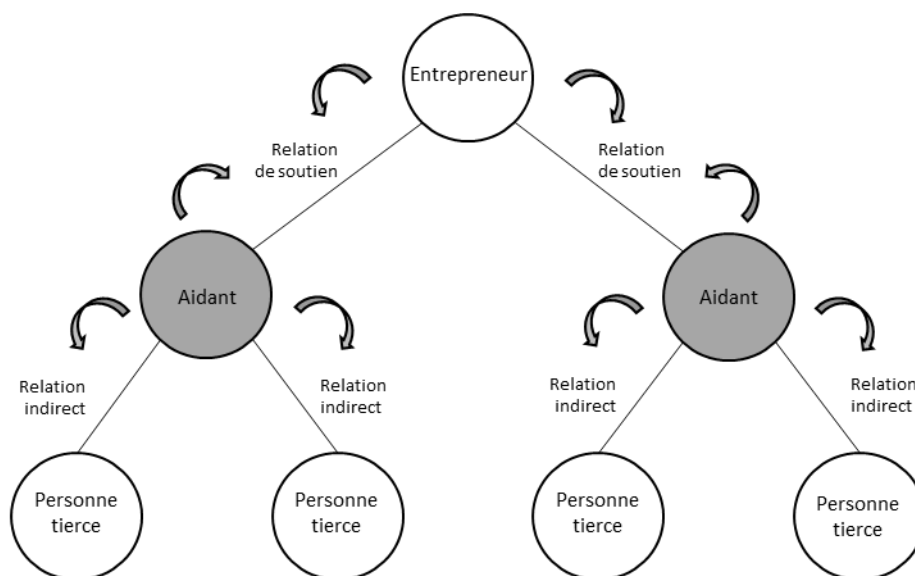
entrepreneurs (Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013 ; Newbert et al., 2013). Cependant, les études approfondies qui ont développé en détail les défis des entrepreneurs n'ont pas directement exploré la dimension relationnelle dans la gestion de ces défis. Même Hanlon et Saunders (2007), qui ont utilisé des entretiens pour explorer la dimension relationnelle, ne sont pas entrés dans la profondeur de l'expérience du phénomène du soutien. L'objectif de ce choix est donc de parvenir à une vision riche de l'aide sociale, tel que Small (2017) et Bernhard (2018) ont réussi à l'atteindre, en même temps que la vision profonde des défis des entrepreneurs, que des études comme Byrne et Shepherd (2015), Cope (2011) et Galkina et Atkova (2020) ont réalisée.

Comme le soutien social doit être considéré comme une phénomène ancré dans le réseau, et non pas simplement comme une affaire qui se déroule dans le cadre d'une relation spécifique (Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2000 ; House, 1987 ; Walker, Wasserman, & Wellman, 1993), la collecte de données par entretiens ne se limite pas simplement aux entrepreneurs. Tant dans la littérature sur le soutien social (par exemple, Sapin et al., 2016 ; Small, 2017 ; Uehara, 1990) que dans la littérature sur l'entrepreneuriat (Bianchi et al., 2018 ; Nielsen, 2017, 2019), des données et informations ont pu être obtenues en consultant des personnes qui ont apporté leur soutien en lien avec leur propre expérience et leurs conditions sociales. Pour cette raison, nous avons donc interrogé des aidants dont les entrepreneurs que nous avons rencontrés avaient reçu un soutien, et ce afin d'obtenir les points de vue complémentaires de leurs expériences personnelles.

Les chapitres III et IV, comme le résume la figure .1 ci-dessous, explorent l'expérience de l'obtention et de l'octroi de soutien à la lumière des relations directes et indirectes qui lient un entrepreneur à des personnes tierces par l'intermédiaire d'un aidant. Suivant la perspective *ptoléméenne* des réseaux, les relations sont considérées comme au cœur des récits sur le soutien (Garud et al., 2014). Nous désignons la combinaison d'une relation directe entre un entrepreneur et un aidant et d'une relation indirecte avec une tierce personne comme une « voie de soutien ». Nous avons mené des entretiens avec des entrepreneurs et avec leurs aidants pour permettre de

saisir ces récits de soutien ainsi que l'expérience des relations, suivant une version simplifiée de l'échantillonnage boule de neige (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981 ; Noy, 2008). La figure .1 ci-dessous décrit cette stratégie d'échantillonnage qui nous a permis d'obtenir des narratifs sur diverses voies de soutien autour des entrepreneurs. Les flèches indiquent quels acteurs nous ont informés à propos de quelles relations au sein de la voie de soutien.

Figure .1 — Echantillonnage boule de neige des interviewés (Chapitres III et IV)



La vue ptoléméenne des réseaux sociaux est développée via trois méthodes d'analyse. Tout d'abord, la méthode *Fuzzy Set Qualitative Case Analysis* (fsQCA) est utilisée au chapitre III (Ragin, 2008 ; Ragin & Davey, 2016) pour montrer explicitement que les relations directes et indirectes se combinent dans les voies de soutien. Ensuite, la méthode *Qualitative Structural Analysis* (QSA) (Herz et al., 2014) est utilisée pour approfondir les cas afin de comprendre les mécanismes relationnels au sein de ces voies. Finalement, l'*Ethnographie Relationnelle* (Desmond, 2014) est utilisée dans le chapitre V pour faire l'expérience directe des mécanismes relationnels par lesquels le soutien à un projet entrepreneurial émerge. Ce chapitre suit un cadre différent, passant d'une mégapole brésilienne à une petite ville française pour explorer plus en profondeur les mécanismes relationnels autour du soutien aux entrepreneurs et à leurs projets.

Ces trois chapitres empiriques (III, IV et V) s'appuient sur des échantillons qui ont été conçus dans l'objectif de regarder au-delà des dyades qui entourent l'entrepreneur, et ainsi d'avoir une vision sociale plus large de l'expérience d'être dans des relations de soutien. Tout au long de ces chapitres, un effort est fait pour raconter l'histoire de ces relations de soutien (Boje, 2001 ; Garud et al., 2014 ; Hjorth, 2007). Les recherches menées dans cette thèse reposent sur les expériences de vie des acteurs comme principale source d'information, et ce afin d'étendre la théorisation du soutien aux entrepreneurs (Schütz, 1970 ; Schütz & Luckmann, 1974).

.3 CONTRIBUTIONS DE LA RECHERCHE

.3.1 Contributions méthodologiques

L'examen de la littérature existante sur le soutien aux entrepreneurs met en évidence que les études ont théorisé le soutien par le biais d'études de réseaux d'une part, et par des discussions sur les attentes culturelles d'autre part. Ces deux types d'études devraient facilement pouvoir être fusionnés, dans la mesure où les études sur les réseaux ont posé et démontré que les réseaux sont à la fois composés de structures de relations et de réseaux de sens (Ferguson, Groenewegen, Moser, Borgatti, & Mohr, 2017 ; Fuhse, 2009 ; Jack, 2010 ; Martin & Lee, 2018). Cependant, comme cela est développé dans le chapitre II, ces deux approches de la question du soutien aux entrepreneurs sont inconciliables en raison des méthodes utilisées. D'un côté, les études de réseaux ont reposé presque exclusivement sur des questionnaires ou ont adopté un codage en détail des entretiens. De l'autre côté, les études sur la culture n'ont pas explicitement problématisé les relations en question. Cependant, comme le montre cette thèse au travers de l'examen des études sur le soutien social en général, ces deux aspects des interactions dans le soutien social peuvent être fusionnés dans le cadre d'une approche phénoménologique et interprétative.

Bien que le réseau soit essentiellement un ensemble de dyades entre acteurs (Kilduff & Brass, 2010), la description des réseaux dans leur complexité repose sur la mesure de l'influence des

relations entre-elles, comme le *block modeling* (Arabie, Boorman, & Levitt, 1978), la centralité de pouvoir (Bonacich, 1987), la contrainte (Burt, 1992, 2004), les orientations *tertius iungens/gaudens* (Grosser, Obstfeld, Labianca, & Borgatti, 2019 ; Obstfeld, 2005), et les cliques (Krackhardt, 1999). Aussi, l'étude des voies de soutien sur la base de triades proposée dans ce travail permet de formuler des propositions qui peuvent ensuite être testées dans le cadre d'études de réseau plus vastes (Mirc, 2012).

L'utilisation de la phénoménologie permet de révéler de quoi traitent ces triades. C'est pourquoi, à la suite des travaux de Cope (2005, 2011) et des suggestions d'Ibarra et al. (2005), Jack (2010) et Shepherd (2015), cette thèse adopte une approche phénoménologique pour investiguer la position des aidants dans ses communautés et dans les voies de soutien. Dans cette thèse, un échantillon de cas et d'entretiens est utilisé pour approfondir les récits qui sont développés dans les voies de soutien (Bamberg, 2006 ; Bernhard, 2016, 2018). Nous utilisons plusieurs méthodes qualitatives pour analyser le contenu de ces entretiens. Chaque chapitre rend une vue de plus en plus proche de l'expérience d'être immergé dans le réseau de soutien autour des entrepreneurs. (Jack et al., 2010)

Tout d'abord, dans le chapitre III, la discussion commence avec la méthode fsQCA et propose une approche configurationnelle basée sur la comparaison croisée de la manière dont les relations au long des voies de soutien s'associent avec le soutien qui est apporté aux entrepreneurs (Douglas, Shepherd, & Prentice, 2020 ; Ragin & Davey, 2016 ; Schneider & Wagemann, 2008). Cette méthode permet de simplifier la compréhension des cas étudiés en les synthétisant dans une vue plus abstraite. A partir des résultats obtenus, nous nous rapprochons ensuite du contenu des entretiens pour proposer une meilleure compréhension des mécanismes relationnels identifiés.

Dans le chapitre IV, les mêmes entretiens sont réutilisés, cette fois pour les analyser en partant d'analyses approfondies au sein des cas, puis en faisant une abstraction « vers le haut » dans l'analyse croisée des cas (Chabaud & Germain, 2006). Dans ce chapitre, l'approche

phénoménologique et interprétativiste est poussée plus loin par l'utilisation de la méthode QSA (Herz et al., 2014). Il s'agit d'une technique d'analyse narrative appliquée spécifiquement aux réseaux, dans laquelle les histoires qui sont racontées dans les entretiens sont à la base de la discussion. Cette technique permet notamment une analyse explicite de l'expérience d'être placé dans une structure de réseau particulière et permet la théorisation sur les raisons pour lesquelles les structures prennent la forme qu'elles ont. Ainsi, cette méthode nous permet-elle de proposer une description des mécanismes plus complexes, basée sur plusieurs évidences idiosyncratiques.

Le chapitre V propose une vue encore plus complexe et idiosyncratique, au plus proche de l'expérience d'être immergé dans le phénomène à l'étude. A partir d'une ethnographie relationnelle (Desmond, 2014), cette recherche apporte une vue des efforts déployés par les acteurs pour se positionner les uns par rapport aux autres face aux défis du réseau élargi. Fondamentalement, cette approche ne diffère pas d'une ethnographie traditionnelle dans la mesure où nous la mobilisons pour décrire et théoriser sur la culture (Marcus, 2012). Cependant, en mobilisant l'ethnographie relationnelle, notre approche est plus spécifique dans la mesure où elle attire l'attention sur les frontières, les conflits et les processus. À la différence d'autres études qui théorisent les réseaux autour des entrepreneurs, notre recherche privilégie une description dense (annexe C) et une discussion ironique qui peut rapprocher le lecteur des défis culturels qui se déploient autour des acteurs en question (Crapanzano, 1986 ; Fine, 2003 ; Fleckenstein, 1999 ; voir Germain & Laifi, 2018 concernant l'utilisation du style littéraire dans l'organisation de la théorisation).

Ces méthodes (fsQCA, QSA et ethnographie relationnelle) sont très utiles pour trouver les mécanismes qui se produisent autour de la structure et du contenu des relations. Cependant, elles sont difficiles à généraliser, du moins d'un point de vue fréquentiste (Brissy, 1978). Il est toutefois important de souligner que l'accent est mis ici sur ce que les approches de la théorie des ensembles appellent les conditions suffisantes mais non nécessaires (Ragin, 2008 ; Siggelkow, 2007). Ces études qualitatives ont pour objectif de remettre en question la théorie établie en observant les

phénomènes connus sous un angle nouveau, en cherchant au-delà de ce qui peut être affirmé logiquement, et en suscitant des discussions futures (Hjorth & Reay, 2018 ; Jack, 2010 ; Karataş-Özkan et al., 2014 ; Shepherd, 2015).

.3.2 Contribution théorique à la littérature

La question que traite cette thèse est la suivante : pourquoi les aidants soutiennent-ils volontairement les entrepreneurs et leurs projets ? Par une revue de la littérature existante sur le soutien aux entrepreneurs, ainsi qu'une revue complémentaire du soutien social en général, cette thèse soutient l'argument selon lequel le soutien social aux entrepreneurs est une question intrinsèquement relationnelle, enracinée à la fois dans la structure du réseau autour des entrepreneurs et dans la manière dont les entrepreneurs « naviguent » parmi les normes culturelles institutionnalisées, en tant que signe de leur légitimité. La thèse procède ensuite au rapprochement de ces deux arguments, guidé par une question plus précise : quels sont les mécanismes relationnels qui permettent de soutenir les entrepreneurs ?

La réponse à cette question est développée dans le chapitre conclusif (VI). Il y est proposé de considérer les aidants comme placés entre différentes cultures dans leur propre réseau. Ils interagissent avec différents groupes qui ont des attentes et des normes différentes. Cela les place dans une position où ils ressentent des tensions et des frustrations. En même temps, l'entrepreneur est en mesure d'utiliser son propre projet pour montrer à ses aidants comment il résout les tensions qui apparaissent entre les cultures, un phénomène qui nous conduit à proposer le concept de *légitimité relationnelle*. En participant à la résolution de tension éprouvées au sein de leur propre réseau en s'engageant avec l'entrepreneur, les aidants font l'expérience d'une vitalité accrue et apprennent de nouvelles façons de « naviguer » entre les attentes et les normes, atteignant un état qualifié de « prospère » (au sens premier du terme, c'est-à-dire synonyme de « heureux », ou « épanoui ») dans la littérature sur le comportement organisationnel (par exemple, Porath,

Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012 ; Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). Il est alors montré que les jugements de légitimité reposent sur des considérations relationnelles et affectives plutôt qu'institutionnelles.

Cette conclusion sur les mécanismes relationnels autour du soutien rendu aux entrepreneurs est fondée sur l'intuition que les réseaux d'aidants sont en proie à des conflits culturels. C'est sur la base de ce constat que nous décrivons les observations qui construisent notre argumentation. Le chapitre V explore la nature de ces désaccords et tensions dans le réseau. À travers la description approfondie d'une ethnographie relationnelle (Desmond, 2014) dans une petite ville de France, ce chapitre montre que les acteurs se trouvent dans des situations difficiles qui découlent d'écarts de sens imprégnant le réseau qui les entoure. Ces tensions sont propres à la position particulière que ces acteurs occupent, c'est-à-dire les individus avec qui ils interagissent directement et avec qui ces individus interagissent eux-mêmes. À partir de cette position unique qu'il occupe, chaque acteur développe une vision distincte de la nature de ces tensions. De cette expérience d'excentricité, ils ont un sentiment d'aliénation par rapport à leur réseau, un sentiment qu'ils qualifient de « spécial ». Le méthode ethnographique permet d'apporter une vue de la culture locale, tout en problématisant le sens du projet entrepreneurial, et en le situant dans un réseau en fonction de ses frontières et de ses défis communautaires (Anderson & Gaddefors, 2016 ; Marcus, 2012).

Le chapitre IV explore la façon dont les alliances se font à mesure que les acteurs se positionnent dans ces conditions « spéciales ». En observant les voies de soutien—c'est à dire des triades d'acteurs comprenant l'entrepreneur, l'aidant et une tierce personne liée à l'aidant—mes co-auteurs et moi-même constatons que les acteurs favorisent activement une expérience d'homophilie entre eux, en soulignant les similitudes dans les situations auxquelles ils sont confrontés et dans les valeurs qu'ils défendent. Nous appelons cela une *coquille homophile* autour de ces acteurs, qui est distincte du reste du réseau environnant. Positionnés au sein d'une telle

coquille, ils peuvent avancer dans un réseau dont ils aspirent à faire partie et trouver la force de résister aux pressions d'un réseau qu'ils jugent hostile et dangereux. Ce chapitre développe l'analyse de narratifs autour du soutien qui est décrit dans l'expérience de faire partie d'une voie de soutien. La méthode QSA apporte une meilleure compréhension de la structure des réseaux sociaux à partir de l'expérience des acteurs (Bamberg, 2006 ; Bernhard, 2018 ; Herz et al., 2014).

Il apparaît clairement que l'expérience de similarité entre les acteurs est une caractéristique déterminante de ces réseaux de soutien. Le chapitre III explore la similarité et la complémentarité entre les acteurs et teste la pertinence des liens indirects le long d'une voie de soutien. Dans ce chapitre, mes co-auteurs et moi-même examinons une forme spécifique de soutien aux entrepreneurs, le conseil, qui permet le transfert de connaissances utiles (Carlile, 2002, 2004 ; Chandler, Kram, & Yip, 2011 ; Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2001 ; Kuhn & Galloway, 2015). Dans cette étude, les voies de soutien sont opérationnalisées en termes d'expériences de vie ou professionnelles, dans la mesure où ces expériences sont une source de connaissances utilisables et transférables à l'entrepreneur (Goswami, Mitchell, & Bhagavatula, 2018 ; St-Jean & Audet, 2012 ; St-Jean & Mathieu, 2015 ; Terjesen & Sullivan, 2011).

En suivant la littérature sur les relations développementales, nous désignons tant les aidants que les tierces personnes ayant une plus grande expérience de vie ou professionnelle comme des *mentors* et ceux ayant une expérience de vie ou professionnelle similaire comme des *pairs* (Birrell & Waters, 1999 ; Kram & Isabella, 1985 ; Parker, Wasserman, Kram, & Hall, 2015). Par définition, il est supposé que les aidants mentors sont plus compétents et, par extension, sont plus avisés pour conseiller les entrepreneurs. Les aidants pairs des entrepreneurs sont, quant à eux, en mesure de s'appuyer sur les connaissances de leurs propres mentors (tierces personnes). Nous complétons cette analyse en observant comment ces relations à des mentors et à des pairs, au sein de la voie de soutien, se combinent avec la possibilité que les entrepreneurs et les tierces personnes interagissent les uns avec les autres. L'entrepreneur a ainsi un accès direct aux connaissances de la tierce

personne et celle-ci peut observer directement les besoins de l'entrepreneur en matière de conseils, discutant ainsi de ces besoins avec l'aidant et améliorant ses conseils.

En utilisant la méthode fsQCA pour observer les combinaisons de relations de soutien dans le réseau, cette thèse révèle l'existence de deux voies de soutien pour apporter des conseils aux entrepreneurs. Dans la première, les aidants sont des pairs des entrepreneurs. Les aidants conseillent ainsi les entrepreneurs de manière systématique et s'inspirent de leurs relations avec de tierces personnes qui sont leurs propres pairs et ce, quelle que soit la relation entre la tierce personne et l'entrepreneur. Nos entretiens nous ont permis d'observer que cette combinaison se produit parce que l'aidant, l'entrepreneur et la tierce personne se trouvent tous dans des situations similaires et sont donc plus à même de fournir des connaissances applicables à la situation de l'entrepreneur. Notre analyse révèle également qu'il existe parfois des barrières relationnelles entre l'entrepreneur et la tierce personne qui empêchent les conseils de se produire dans leur relation.

Dans la seconde solution, le conseil se produit lorsque les aidants se tournent vers des tierces personnes qui sont leurs pairs et qui interagissent également avec l'entrepreneur. Cette situation représente une voie de soutien dans une triade de soutien fermée et ne dépend pas du statut de l'aidant par rapport à l'entrepreneur (qu'il ait le rôle de mentor ou de pair). Dans nos entretiens, il est clair que les aidants (tant les mentors que les pairs) établissent leur position dans le réseau plus large en fournissant des conseils aux entrepreneurs et aux tierces personnes, ainsi qu'en jouant un rôle actif pour encourager l'interaction entre les entrepreneurs et les tierces personnes (voir Obstfeld, 2005).

Dans une considération plus globale, nous montrons que la similarité entre les acteurs est essentielle pour établir des voies de soutien aux entrepreneurs dans un réseau donné. Le soutien aux entrepreneurs intègre les aidants (mentors et pairs) au sein de ce réseau car ils développent une expérience d'homophilie et travaillent autour de situations qui mettent en évidence un décalage culturel dans les groupes auxquels ils participent. Le projet de l'entrepreneur a donc le potentiel de

résoudre ces inadéquations tout au long des relations. Lorsqu'il y parvient, les aidants considèrent le projet de l'entrepreneur comme légitime et connaissent un état d'épanouissement en soutenant l'entrepreneur et son projet.

.3.3 Contributions managériales

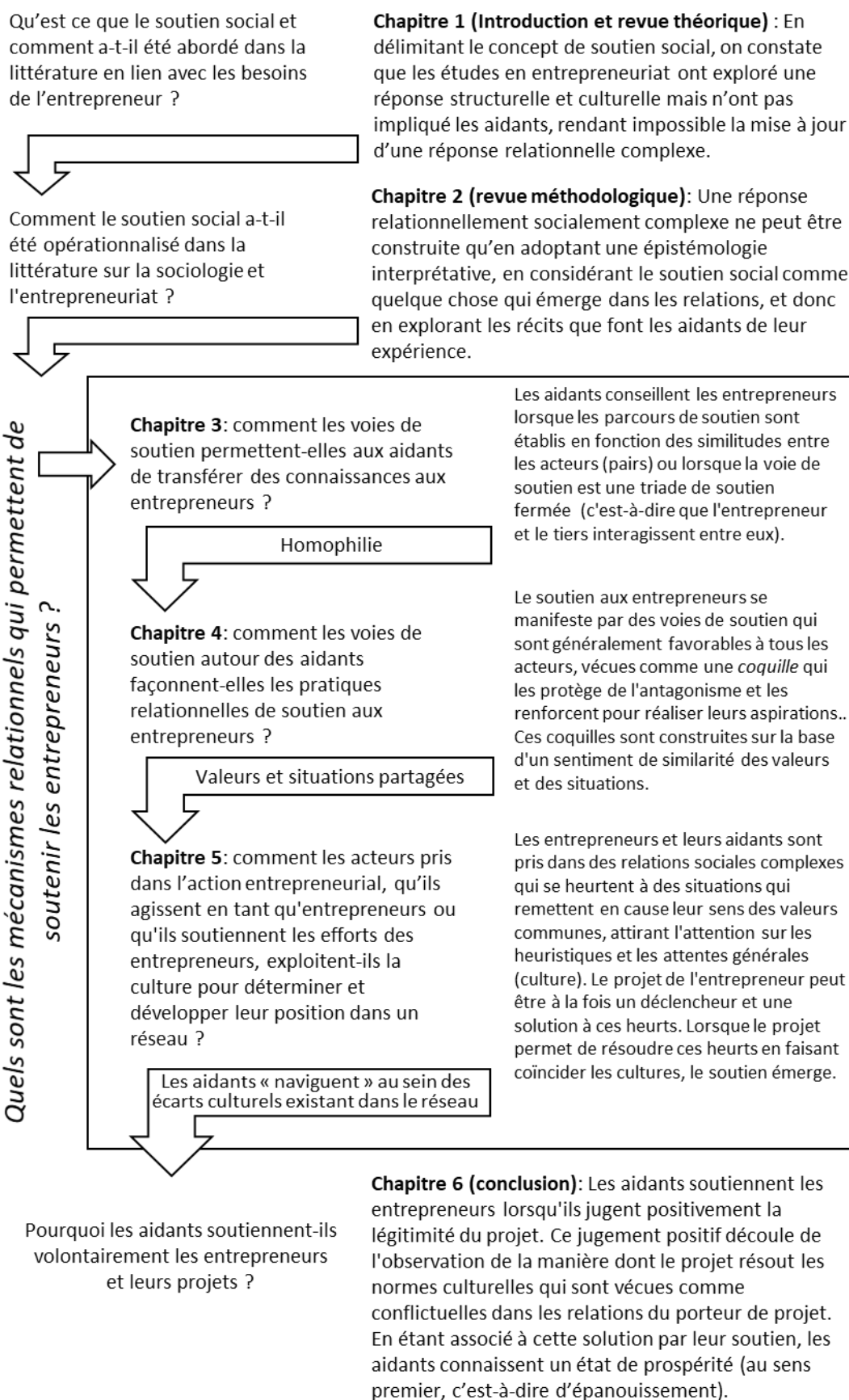
Nos conclusions montrent que les entrepreneurs peuvent étendre leur accès aux ressources en encourageant leurs aidants à approfondir et à élargir leurs propres relations, tant sur le thème de l'entrepreneuriat que dans la résolution globale des problèmes. Les aidants peuvent être encouragés à s'intégrer dans leurs propres réseaux de soutien, qui servent ensuite de source de connaissances utiles à l'entrepreneur. En interagissant avec des personnes ayant des défis de vie similaires aux leurs, les connaissances applicables peuvent être redirigées vers l'entrepreneur. Les entrepreneurs peuvent également encourager leurs aidants à rechercher leur propre mentorat comme moyen d'accéder à des connaissances codifiées. Une communication spécifique de la part de l'entrepreneur concernant sa propre situation est cruciale, ce qui est souvent plus facile à maintenir en gardant la relation avec l'aidant liée à un seul type de domaine d'interaction, à savoir celui du travail dans l'entrepreneuriat. Cela suppose que l'entrepreneur prenne du recul par rapport à ses propres intérêts et attentes, et qu'il soumette son projet au réseau qui l'entoure. En s'impliquant avec les acteurs qui l'entourent, il trouve les moyens de résoudre, d'apaiser, de réduire les tensions et donc de gagner en crédibilité dans le réseau.

.4 Démarche Générale et plan de la thèse

La figure .2 présente un résumé de la thèse. La question globale de recherche est la suivante : *Pourquoi les aidants soutiennent-ils volontairement les entrepreneurs et leurs projets ?* La thèse commence par deux chapitres de revue de littérature qui abordent la question du soutien social, à la fois de manière générale et dans la littérature sur l'entrepreneuriat. Le chapitre I consiste en une

Figure .2 – Résumé de la thèse

Pourquoi les aidants soutiennent-t-ils volontairement les entrepreneurs et leurs projets ?



revue théorique et le chapitre II propose une revue des méthodes utilisées dans les études sur le soutien social. Ces deux chapitres, pris ensemble, démontrent les limitations des études du soutien aux entrepreneurs en se basant sur une comparaison avec la littérature en sociologie sur le soutien social. Sur cette base, il est ensuite possible de procéder à des investigations empiriques, qui sont guidées par une question de recherche secondaire, plus ciblée : *quels sont les mécanismes relationnels qui permettent de soutenir les entrepreneurs ?* Les trois chapitres suivants, les chapitres III à V, explorent les mécanismes relationnels, tant structurels que culturels. Le premier de ces chapitres empiriques (chapitre III) observe des arguments plus structurels. Le second (chapitre IV) équilibre les arguments structurels et culturel. Le dernier de ces chapitres empiriques (chapitre V) approfondit les mécanismes culturels. Enfin, le tout dernier chapitre de cette thèse (chapitre VI) revient sur la question générale de la recherche, en discutant d'un modèle qui s'appuie sur les connaissances acquises dans les chapitres empiriques pour former une théorie du soutien social aux entrepreneurs. Un modèle conceptuel intégré complet qui rassemble toutes les constructions proposées est brièvement présenté en conclusion de ce dernier chapitre.

Cette thèse est développée comme suit. Le chapitre I commence par un examen des besoins des entrepreneurs en matière de soutien social ainsi que des arguments relationnels concernant la manière dont ce soutien est assuré. Parallèlement à cet examen de l'entrepreneuriat, nous attirons l'attention sur les idées de la littérature existante en sociologie qui traite du soutien social. Il est important d'étudier le soutien aux entrepreneurs car, bien que le soutien social en tant que domaine d'investigation ait été discuté de manière assez approfondie, la littérature sur l'entrepreneuriat n'en a pas tiré toute la richesse et ce pour deux raisons. Premièrement, les arguments structurels n'ont pas été fusionnés avec les arguments culturels et institutionnels. L'identification de cette lacune théorique conclut le chapitre introductif. Deuxièmement, et ce point est plus problématique, les cadres méthodologiques et épistémologiques ont imposé des limites à la manière dont cette fusion des points de vue serait opérationnalisée, manquant ainsi la richesse de la littérature sociologique

qui traite généralement du phénomène du soutien social. Ces questions sont examinées dans le chapitre II, qui compare et discute la façon dont le soutien social a été opérationnalisé dans les sciences sociales avec la façon dont il a été opérationnalisé dans l'entrepreneuriat. Il est critique de reconnaître le fait que, pour saisir les complexités relationnelles entourant la question du soutien, il est nécessaire de passer d'une vision dyadique et d'échange du soutien, centrée sur les entrepreneurs, à une vision interprétativiste, portant sur l'expérience des aidants d'être en relation avec l'entrepreneur et entourés d'autres relations. Cela justifie les choix méthodologiques pour les trois chapitres empiriques suivants. Étant donné que deux de ces chapitres empiriques utilisent les mêmes données, le chapitre II expose le plan de recherche et l'échantillon utilisé dans les chapitres III et IV.

Les trois chapitres empiriques (chapitres III, IV et V) explorent diverses dynamiques relationnelles autour des aidants qui apportent leur soutien. Ces chapitres approfondissent le gap théorique qui a été découvert lors de la revue de littérature sur les structures des réseaux, les références culturelles et le soutien social. Ici, la question primordiale est la suivante : *quels sont les mécanismes relationnels qui permettent de soutenir les entrepreneurs ?* En attirant l'attention sur les mécanismes relationnels, l'agence (au sens de *agency*) se répartit entre l'entrepreneur et ses aidants.

Spécifiquement, dans le chapitre III, Dr. Andrew Parker, Dr. Erno Tornikoski et moi-même développons un argument essentiellement structurel autour des conjonctions des relations de soutien direct et des relations indirectes qui situent un aidant entre un entrepreneur ayant besoin de conseils et une tierce personne importante pour l'aide. Notre question de recherche est la suivante : *comment les voies de soutien permettent-elles aux aidants de transférer des connaissances aux entrepreneurs ?* Ce chapitre développe comment les différents rôles de développement, c'est-à-dire les rôles de pair et de mentor, se répartissent selon des structures triadiques pour fournir une forme spécifique de soutien et de conseil. Nous constatons qu'il existe deux types de combinaisons

de relations directes et indirectes où le conseil émerge : lorsque les aidants sont des pairs des entrepreneurs et qu'ils sont en relation avec leurs propres pairs, ainsi que dans des triades fermées où les aidants sont en relation avec leurs propres pairs. Fondamentalement, nous notons que les liens avec les pairs des aidants jouent un rôle central pour permettre au conseil aux entrepreneurs d'émerger.

Dans le chapitre IV, le Dr Gazi Islam se joint au Dr Andrew Parker et à moi-même pour approfondir les mécanismes relationnels de ces voies de soutien. Ayant établi dans le chapitre précédent que les relations indirectes le long de la voie de soutien sont importantes pour permettre le soutien aux entrepreneurs, nous décortiquons les mécanismes par lesquels ces relations fonctionnent ensemble pour façonner le soutien. La question de recherche qui se pose ici est la suivante : *comment les voies de soutien autour des aides façonnent-elles les pratiques relationnelles de soutien aux entrepreneurs ?* Dans cette étude, nous montrons que les efforts de soutien déployés sont associés à des efforts visant à renforcer les similitudes entre un entrepreneur, un aidant et le contact de l'aidant, par rapport au réseau plus large. Ces efforts renforcent la position des aidants au sein du réseau.

Ces deux chapitres empiriques ont été élaborés à partir d'une série d'entretiens avec des entrepreneurs brésiliens et leurs aidants, au sein d'un grand centre urbain. Nos données révèlent ainsi plusieurs relations qui permettent de soutenir les entrepreneurs. Bien que la dynamique relationnelle fondamentale de l'entrepreneuriat devrait être assez banale quelle que soit la situation géographique (par exemple, Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986 ; Anderson et al., 2012), on peut dire que nos résultats montrent que le soutien aux entrepreneurs est le produit de facteurs contextuels spécifiques et « exotiques » (Spigel, 2017 ; Welter, Baker, Audretsch, & Gartner, 2017). Alors, le chapitre V présente une réflexion sur la base d'observations ethnographiques dans un tout autre cadre : une petite ville de France. Ce dernier chapitre empirique reprend théoriquement la suite du chapitre IV, en révélant les mêmes défis que ceux auxquels il a été fait allusion dans l'échantillon

brésilien. Ce chapitre présente toutefois des entretiens et des observations directes permettant de décrire la manière dont les acteurs gèrent les nombreuses difficultés relationnelles qui imprègnent les communautés où se déroule le processus de création d'entreprise. La question de recherche de ce chapitre est la suivante : *comment les acteurs qui sont pris dans l'action entrepreneuriale, qu'ils agissent en tant qu'entrepreneurs ou qu'ils soutiennent les efforts des entrepreneurs, articulent-ils la culture pour déterminer et développer leur position dans un réseau ?* Ce chapitre montre que les relations harmonieuses mentionnées précédemment se concrétisent lorsque tous les acteurs impliqués dans le processus entrepreneurial utilisent la culture qui les entoure comme fondement d'une structure en réseau de relations difficiles (Überbacher, 2014).

Enfin, dans une conclusion co-écrite avec le Dr. Erno Tornikoski¹, ces résultats sont rassemblés et nous permettent de théoriser sur les fondements affectifs de ces mécanismes relationnels lorsque les aidants jugent la légitimité des efforts des entrepreneurs, ainsi que la légitimité de leurs propres efforts pour soutenir les entrepreneurs. Nous proposons que ces efforts qui renforcent la position des aidants aux côtés d'un entrepreneur sont associés aux attentes des aidants pour atteindre un état de prospérité (au sens premier du terme, c'est-à-dire celui de l'épanouissement). Il est également important de souligner qu'il s'agit d'une pratique relationnelle qui garantit des jugements de légitimité, un processus que nous appelons légitimité relationnelle. Considérés ensemble, ces éléments révèlent une expérience sociale qui guide les aidants dans leur propre vie, dans laquelle le soutien à l'entrepreneur a un sens pour eux, car ils prennent conscience des besoins des entrepreneurs et y répondent, tout en améliorant leur propre vie.

¹ Les parties du premier chapitre concernant la légitimité ont également été corédigées avec le Dr Erno Tornikoski.

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Relational Underpinnings of Social Support to Entrepreneurs

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1.0 PROLOGUE

This is not a hero story.

From the moment a napkin was scribbled upon to the finalization of the IPO, the entrepreneur has put forth a vision, using special foresight to design a project that exploits an opportunity of special import—a hero story, but one that ignores how the context in which the entrepreneur is inserted shaped the conditions for their project to thrive (Anderson & Smith, 2007; Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Germain, 2017; Goss, 2005).

In this thesis, I observe the social context of entrepreneurship as support relationships around entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are set in unclear, unsettling situations that they need to untangle if they are to maintain their function as entrepreneurs (for example, Baron, Franklin, & Hmieleski, 2016). After all, as simply put by Shepherd (2003: 318), “businesses fail”. The objective is to understand where support comes from, that is, support that enables entrepreneurs to build their ventures. In this sense, the entrepreneur is not endowed with any special qualities other than being able to articulate the position they occupy among other supportive actors. This thesis is set within the assumption that entrepreneurship is an inherently social phenomenon (Anderson et al., 2012; Downing, 2005), where relationships are a key feature of interest (Garud et al., 2014; Hoang & Yi, 2015; Jack, 2010; Spigel, 2017; Welter et al., 2017).

Entrepreneurs are defined as individuals who seek partnerships to build new businesses by using the resources of others (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990). However, without considering the constraints and possibilities that surround supporters, this simplistic definition can give the false impression that entrepreneurs have access to infinite support and that innovatively recombining these resources is merely a matter of willpower to set out to build networks. Although entrepreneurs have a special, leading role in bringing about change (“*animateur*” [Vestrum, 2014: 620]), they are set within a network where entrepreneurship emerges as a process of change through interactions (Garud, Gehman, & Giuliani, 2018; Steyaert & van

Looy, 2010). This change process is inherently relational (Anderson et al., 2012; Steyaert & Katz, 2004) because entrepreneurs surrounded by supporters, who are people who “willingly provide access to a valued resource” (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007: 607).

In this introductory chapter, I review the assumptions, key definitions, findings, and methods used in entrepreneurship literature regarding support to entrepreneurs. I start this introductory chapter by reviewing entrepreneurs’ needs for support, highlighting the urgent need for intangible support, that is, informational and emotional support. Within the entrepreneurship literature, I demonstrate two approaches to discussing how entrepreneurs deal with these needs: one that emphasizes entrepreneurs own cognitive and affective strategies to handle these needs, and one that emphasizes how relationships around entrepreneurs meet these needs. I then proceed to unpack the key issues posited in extant literature that motivates support relationships to entrepreneurs.

I divide these relational discussions into two main fields that explain support to entrepreneurs. On the one hand, the answer is found in networks of the entrepreneur’s direct relationships with supporters (for example, Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998; Dubini & Aldrich, 1991; Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013). Here, the main intuition is that support flows from specific network configurations that entrepreneurs build. These configurations would entice, induce, or perhaps even coerce supporters to “willfully support”, that is, render resources to entrepreneurs. On the other hand, specific relationships and their networks are left as a secondary issue and adequacy to cultural norms and expectations, that is, legitimacy, becomes the main driver (for example, Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Lounsbury, Gehman, & Glynn, 2019; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019; Suchman, 1995; Überbacher, Jacobs, & Cornelissen, 2015). Here, the main intuition is that entrepreneurs have “toolkits” that are full of cultural references which they can articulate and display in order to convince supporters that they warrant support. Both of these approaches focus on the entrepreneur’s efforts, stripping the supporter of their agency (see Nielsen [2014, 2019] for a notable exception).

I first review entrepreneurs' needs for intangible support, such as the provision of knowledge and emotional support, showing that the challenge of being an entrepreneur requires much more than tangible resources from supporters. Subsequently, I review insights from sociological discussions on social support with discussions in entrepreneurship literature on support to entrepreneurs. This comparison is done first around core definitions and key mechanisms, and then done around dyad- and network-level mechanisms, since the present preoccupation is around the relational underpinnings of support. I finally switch to a key proposition around support to entrepreneurs, that is, that supporters support because they sense that the endeavor is "legitimate" (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Überbacher, 2014; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002), and show how this proposition lacks theorization of the social-psychological processes that facilitate such judgements.

1.1 ENTREPRENEURS' NEEDS FOR INTANGIBLE SUPPORT

Entrepreneurship is an emotionally harrowing process to go through (Rauch et al., 2018). Entrepreneurs face lack of resources (Jarillo, 1989; Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990; Villanueva, Van de Ven, & Sapienza, 2012), liability of newness (Choi & Shepherd, 2005; Van de Ven, 1993), and the possibility of taking the new project to any possible direction (Hayward, Forster, Sarasvathy, Fredrickson, & Hayward, 2010). Engaging in entrepreneurship is a high risk situation to be in and comes rife with uncertainty and emotional demands, and an entrepreneurs' willingness to bear this uncertainty lies at the heart of their ability to create a new firm (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). While it would be convenient to have specific pieces of information that bring full clarity to entrepreneurs' challenges, entrepreneurs are faced with dynamic and uncertain environments. Rather, they have to call upon general heuristics and "sense out" contextual cues within the uncertainty at hand (Haynie, Shepherd, Mosakowski, & Earley, 2010). Entrepreneurs are, so put it simply, in a particularly stressful position.

Entrepreneurs find themselves having to balance expectations placed upon them in their several relationships, with investors who expect returns on their investment, precious first clients who need to be well served and to whom the entrepreneur must listen, family that demands support of all sorts, partners who need to be paid, and so on (Wincent & Örtqvist, 2009). Entrepreneurs suffer strain on their information processing abilities because they are doing several things at the same time (Shepherd, 2004), while making decisions that will set the course of their new firm for years to come (Bryant, 2014). These factors set the stage for stress to be particularly high when starting a new venture (Przepiorka, 2016) and is exacerbated in times of economic downturn (Pollack, Vanepps, & Hayes, 2012).

While there can be high rewards for founding a new firm, such as financial returns, autonomy, and the chance to leave a legacy (Jennings, Jennings, & Sharifian, 2016; Rindova, Barry, & Ketchen, 2009; Verduyn, Dey, Tedmanson, & Essers, 2014), the chances that the new firm will fail are great (Shepherd, 2003). How the entrepreneur perceives the relationship between returns and risk can increase their levels of stress—if the expected return is great, the entrepreneur might be willing to be exposed to greater risk, and therefore is placed up against the high possibility of experiencing risky situations (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006; Shepherd et al., 2007). How they handle such uncertainty becomes crucial in being able to avoid being overrun by stress (de Mol, Ho, & Pollack, 2018; Shepherd, 2009), ultimately affecting how well their endeavor is managed (Hessels, Rietveld, Thurik, & van der Zwan, 2018) and the enjoyment of entrepreneurship experienced by entrepreneurs (Wincent & Örtqvist, 2009). High levels of stress and depression are an antecedent to entrepreneurial exit (Hessels et al., 2018; Przepiorka, 2016), while emotional turmoil can lead to avoidance strategies, where entrepreneurs put off the most difficult decisions to avoid even greater emotional strain, even in the certainty that failing to make a timely decision will result in greater financial loss (Shepherd, Wiklund, & Haynie, 2009). Managing the processes of

a company requires confidence and overall mental well-being (Cardon & Patel, 2015; Rauch et al., 2018; Wincent & Örtqvist, 2009).

1.1.1 Theoretical discussions of entrepreneurs' needs

Two research streams have addressed these challenges. In one, psychological dynamics are explored. For example, while role stress is an antecedent to low entrepreneurial satisfaction and venture performance, as well as to depression and negative impacts on family life, overall positive affect (Cardon & Patel, 2015), self-efficacy (Hessels et al., 2018) and the belief that destiny is involved in allowing the situation to be what it is (de Mol et al., 2018) all work as buffers to these effects of stress. Personal characteristics, such as high tolerance for stress, optimism, hope, and resilience are associated with persistence in the face of the harrowing situations in entrepreneurship (Shepherd, 2009), also bringing actors with these characteristics to self-select into such activities and those who do not possess them, to self-select out (Baron et al., 2016). Self-compassion in the face of frustrations (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006) and an overall positive attitude towards one's self and one's environment (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011) also enable handling emotionally charged challenges. These, however, can, at least in some degree, be learned (Ucbasaran, Wright, Westhead, & Busenitz, 2003). Addressing the timing of decisions so that their implementation will be emotionally manageable, through procrastination, helps entrepreneurs to manage difficult processes that involve high uncertainty and learn from them (Shepherd et al., 2009).

Cognitive strategies have been found to enhance entrepreneurs' resilience. Learning strategies, such as alternation between distraction and avoidances strategies and reflexive thinking, can dose the emotional turmoil and help entrepreneurs to deliberate upon their actions (Shepherd, 2003). This stream has recognized that relationships around entrepreneurs can enhance these buffering cognitive frameworks. Examples of this are entrepreneurs' families' supporting them

while navigating grief (Shepherd, 2003), entrepreneurs' personal ties assisting in mitigating the magnitude of the risk/return ratio (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), and those ties to supporters that remain with the entrepreneur after their failure actively cheering on their persistence (Cope, 2011). However, the importance of relationships to navigating such emotional challenges are not fully fleshed out in these discussions of psychological processes. Still, this stream is included throughout the review below because it is descriptive of the emotional challenges entrepreneurs face. Even when discussing psychological processes, social conditions are a vital, though undertheorized, component.

In the other research stream addressing entrepreneurs' needs for intangible support, leaning towards a resource-based view, supporters have been acknowledged in their ability to mitigate the stress-related factors by providing all sorts of assistance. This literature explicitly lists people that surround the entrepreneur by providing assistance as "supporters" (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007), "helpers" (Kotha & George, 2012), or, as a collective, an "action set" (Aldrich & Kim, 2005; Hansen, 1995). Supporters are seen as relevant first and foremost because they provide resources (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007), which can be particularly diverse because they can reach into clusters from the surrounding network that the entrepreneur cannot access directly (Dubini & Aldrich, 1991). While these relationships can start with instrumental exchanges, these interactions come with an affective dimension that can build trust (Huang & Knight, 2017) and solidarity (Bianchi et al., 2018) between entrepreneurs and their supporters, thereby becoming relationships that provide the emotional support that is greatly valued by entrepreneurs (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007). Still, with the exception of Nielsen, (2017, 2019), these studies remain focused on entrepreneurs' experience as objects of support efforts, and supporters' experience in rendering support has not been brought to the foreground.

In a nutshell, the following review highlights that relationships around entrepreneurs provide key mechanisms that can mitigate the emotional turmoil experienced by entrepreneurs, and even

promote emotional well-being that can enhance their decision-making. In the following sections, we review the literature on social support both within and outside entrepreneurship studies. By complementing a review on support within entrepreneurship literature with insights on this matter from other fields, I hope to inspire new research agendas regarding the power of relationships to meet entrepreneurs' needs for emotional support and knowledge.

1.2 SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A RESPONSE TO A FOCAL ACTOR'S NEEDS

We see that entrepreneurs have great need for support in facing challenges that entail psychological distress, requiring the establishment of supportive relationships. In the present section, I begin by reviewing the key assumptions and definitions regarding social support, in general. I also review some of the key findings in fields other than entrepreneurship. I include a small digression to distinguish social support from social capital to emphasize the distinct contribution that social support literature can make to discussions of support to entrepreneurs. To close this section, I review the key assumptions and definitions in discussions that specifically focus on support to entrepreneurs and identify avenues to extend these discussions.

1.2.1 Key assumptions and definitions in discussions of social support

1.2.1.1 Social support and health

I turn to the study of social support as a portrayal of the response to a given actor's position of distress in a challenging situation. In this section, I present the insights that I will draw from when comparing this literature stream with what has been achieved so far in discussions regarding support to entrepreneurs. The purpose here is to present the reader with a general view of support as a general, social, and relational phenomenon, and then problematize the discussion of support to entrepreneurs, specifically.

The study of social support grew out of the intuition that relationships enhance a focal actor's well-being (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Cohen et al., 2000; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). This literature recognizes that scarcity of resources is a key impingement on actors' well-being (Bianchi et al., 2018), and that, therefore, relationships have the potential to alleviate suffering by providing resources (for example, Agneessens, Waeye, & Lievens, 2006; Uehara, 1990). However, this discussion is not mainly about the accrual of resources. The key question in these studies is to find the mechanisms through which health is promoted, and the provision of resources is just one way for this to happen (Uchino, 2009; Uchino, Bowen, Carlisle, & Birmingham, 2012; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996).

These studies often maintain an eye towards the effect of relationships on both the absence of unhealthy effects, as well as towards the effects on promoting well-being (Schumaker & Brownell, 1984). The two main mechanisms often discussed here are whether relationships have a "buffering" effect, or whether there is also a main effect on the focal actor's health (Cohen et al., 2000). In the first case, the question is if there is a moderating effect of relationships that diminishes emotional stress. In the second, the investigation focuses on the positive effects of relationships on the focal actor's health (Uchino et al., 1996). When honing in on these effects, these studies look towards the effects of relationships on other relationships, thereby also teasing out effects of adding and subtracting relationships on health matters (House, 1987; Uehara, 1990). These studies also recognize that there is a large diversity in the forms of support, as well as different forms of relationships within different social contexts and needs (Agneessens et al., 2006; Brashears & Quintane, 2018; House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988; Thoits, 1986; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). All this, therefore, requires a view of complexity when approaching these mechanisms that promote well-being through relationships.

1.2.1.2 Social support and care

Simply stated, at the center of these discussions is the understanding that people care for people. One early definition for social support is, “the existence or availability of people on whom we can rely, people who let us know that they care about, value, and love us” (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983: 127). To initiate the mechanisms that promote well-being in relationships, the focal actor is seen to have a particular need (Small & Sukhu, 2016). The surrounding actors, then, are responsive to these needs in greater or lesser degrees in ways that are experienced as demonstrations of compassion and kindness, or lack thereof (Thoits, 1986).

The mechanisms sought out in these discussions, then, often have to do with what enables or inhibits the supporters’ responsiveness to the focal actor’s particular needs for support (Kanov et al., 2004; Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008). For example, this can come in the form of skills, role expectations, or quantity of demands (Fischer, 1982; House, 1987; Uehara, 1990; Vaux, 1985). The effects of such support as a form of compassion and kindness is that the focal actor feels their needs are taken care of, that they have a worth within their social system, and that they are capable of achieving the means to meet the demands pressed upon them (Schumaker & Brownell, 1984; Uchino et al., 1996).

1.2.2 Social support and patterns of relationships

Initial studies in social support sought out the effects of the amount of relationships around a focal actor. At this time, by definition, the amount of social support around a focal actor was seen to be the amount of relationships they had (Uehara, 1990). Although lacking in the complexities around the types of relationships, diversity of needs, and so on, initial studies identified that there was, indeed, an association between the existence of relationships and improved well-being (for reviews, see Cohen et al., 2000 and Uchino et al., 2012). Social support, in this framework, is the existence of relationships (House, 1987).

As the complexities of relationships were unpacked, the importance of the whole makeup of the network showed its relevance. Relationships were found to have impacts on other relationships. These interconnected relationships change the access that focal actors had to necessary resources, impose specific forms of responsiveness on potential supporters, overload supporters with demands, or even provide support to supporters that would enable them to, in turn, respond to other actors' needs (Ryan et al., 2008; Uehara, 1990). The move towards describing support networks, rather than sets of relationships around the focal actor, brought a view towards the dynamic, diverse, and unique social situations that enable specific support efforts to focal actors (Walker et al., 1993; Wellman & Wortley, 1990).

As these relational complexities began to be explored, the concept of social support decoupled from the relationships *per se*, and the nature of the actions taken in response to the focal actor's need was discussed as "support" (Agneessens et al., 2006; Brashears & Quintane, 2018). Social support became a response to a need that is facilitated or constrained by patterns of relationships in the network (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Note the definition of social support provided by Bianchi et al. (2018: 62): "Social support mainly encompasses a material (or tangible) along with an emotional (or intangible) component, according to the nature of the resources which one is asked to mobilize in order to help the recipient." While the definition has shifted from the existing relationships to the provided support efforts, relationality around support is still at the heart of the mechanisms that promote well-being and attenuate emotional turmoil. It is in addition to relationships that the nature of the need and the response to this need are also observed quite closely.

1.2.3 Presenting the need for support and seeking support

At the center of social support is the existence of a need that is to be addressed by surrounding supporters. Thoits (1986: 417) defines social support as the "functions performed for a distressed

individual by significant others.” The focal actor experiences a challenge in a particular situation, and can choose to reach out for support (Small, 2017; Small & Sukhu, 2016). Here, the literature on social support has embraced the framework of a rational actor who deliberates upon the relationships at hand and purposefully selects among the available relationships to activate a support relationship. However, the social support literature embraces the rational actor framework quite tentatively (see Uehara, 1990 for a critique of rationality in social support models, and Jones, Hesterly, & Borgatti, 1997 for a similar critique in social network models in general).

Small and Sukhu (2016) call upon the Dual-Process Theory approach (Stanovich & West, 2000), which places, on the one side, deliberative reflection as one mode of reasoning. Such rational deliberation is an example of what Kahneman, (2003) refers to as “slow thinking” . Small and Sukhu (2016) place the deliberation of a rational actor at one end of a spectrum. On the other end, they place intuitive, spontaneous activation of relationships. In these instances, the urgency of a particular need in a given situation can make the accessibility of actors the crucial factor in signaling needs for social support (see also Small, 2017). In other words, while the most competent, trustworthy potential supporter might indeed rationally be the best one to turn to, the fact that other people are near the focal actor at the moment of need, in the situation they face, means that they are the ones to whom the focal actor signals the need for support. Here, support seeking is spontaneous and evaluations of appropriateness of requesting support are intuitive or, in Kahneman's (2003) words, “fast”.

It is important to stress that, while recognizing deliberation and reflexive selection of potential supporters, the literature that describes social support raises crucial factors that also lend themselves to intuitive, spontaneous choices. These emerge according to the configuration of the challenging situation at hand because actors map out features of relationships that are conducive to generating supportive or challenging social situations (for example, Agneessens et al., 2006; Bianchi et al., 2018; Brashears & Quintane, 2018; Holschuh & Segal, 2002; Sapin, Widmer, &

Iglesias, 2016; Uehara, 1990; Walker et al., 1993). This point will become quite important for opening avenues to advance the theorization of support to entrepreneurs which, as I will demonstrate below, has more often than not failed to look at a relational setting beyond entrepreneurs' direct relationships.

1.2.4 Social support and resources—the content of the support

Once the challenging situation is perceived by potential supporters, a wide array of forms of responses are possible (for example, Agneessens et al., 2006; Herz, 2015; Thoits, 1986; Uchino, 2009; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). In broad strokes, both instrumental and emotional responses are contemplated within this literature as forms of social support (House, Umberson, et al., 1988). Most importantly, however, is that the provision of resources reflects the development of the relationships at hand (Walker et al., 1993). For example, Bianchi, Casnici, and Squazzoni (2018) show how instrumental exchanges of support were the grounds that generated solidarity among the entrepreneurs, thereby motivating them to subsequently provide each other with emotional support. The resources that are expected in social support vary according to different focal actors, their different challenges, and the possibilities that different potential supporters have in responding to these needs (Uchino, 2009; Walker et al., 1993).

Much criticism has been made in sociological discussions of relying too heavily on exchange theory (Jones et al., 1997; Uehara, 1990), a criticism that I suggest entrepreneurship studies would do well to heed. The critique lies in the notion that exchange theory posits that actors observe each other's forms of support in order to coerce each other into providing a given resource. In this critique, it is assessed that this distortion comes from both overestimating the rationality of actors (Jones et al., 1997) and underestimating non-rational mental processes such as emotions and affect (Lawler, 2001; see also Goss, 2010 for a similar critique in entrepreneurship studies). Rather, these studies of social support theorize how actors are more interested in handling the relationships for

the sake of the relationship itself (House, et al., 1988; Nurallah, 2012; Sapin et al., 2016; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). The response to someone in need is grounded in the established relationship (Fischer, 1982; Sarason et al., 1983). Actors look towards the relationship itself and tend to the issues that can sever or uphold this relationship (Jung, 1988). Therefore, they are sensitive to the particular expectations associated with their role in the relationship and the uniqueness of the situation the focal actor is facing (Agneessens et al., 2006; Brashears & Quintane, 2018; Uehara, 1990).

1.2.5 Group level mechanisms in securing social support

We have seen so far that social support is first and foremost a relational issue, where actions are taken, including both instrumental and emotional support, to meet a challenge faced by a focal actor and thereby curb emotional turmoil and, possibly, enhancing well-being. While on the one hand, these actions can emerge from the existing relationships around the focal actor, they can also involve new potential supporters according to the urgency of the challenge at hand and the availability of surrounding potential supporters. Once social support has been established to the focal actor, what mechanisms guarantee that this support will continue to provide the supported actor with optimal conditions for their well-being?

Access to social support is enhanced when participating in groups that enable a sense that support is to be made available (Uehara, 1990). Well-being and emotional turmoil are promoted or curbed as the focal actor gets involved in upholding the group's interests (Ryan et al., 2008). Such action provides returns where the focal actor increases the feeling that they have worth, inasmuch as they have provided benefits for the group, and that they have personal control over their own lives (Cohen et al., 2000; Nurallah, 2012).

Reciprocity is still theorized to play a key role in how social support is provided, although social support literature is wary of reducing the provision of support to social ledgers. Such a

metaphor would reduce these support relationships to ones between deliberating rational actors who keep track of who is in debt to whom in exchange relationships. In the study of people facing job loss in Chicago, Uehara (1990) shows that different groups have different rules and expectations about how reciprocity is to be understood, basically observing either generalized or restricted reciprocity. Restricted reciprocity is where, within the relationship, the actors are well aware of who did what for whom, and therefore is in debt to each other. In generalized reciprocity, the understanding is that support efforts rendered generate a sense of goodwill, and therefore will lead to receiving support efforts when in need at a later time.

Rather than discuss whether one or the other form of reciprocity is the correct form to fit the model, it is suggested that studies would do better to capture the complexity of the phenomenon of support by considering that different cultural norms and group-level challenges dictate specific means to respond to the need for support (Agneessens et al., 2006). The question, then, when approaching such matters in social support studies is what the regime of exchange is within the particular research setting, rather than assume a deliberation-based exchange of support governed “naturally” by restricted reciprocity (Lawler, 2001). Here, we see inklings that supporting a particular actor in need passes through a judgement whether this actor’s projects are, in a general sense, socially desirable and appropriate (Suchman, 1995), that is, legitimate (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; O’Neil & Ucbasaran, 2016; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002).

In short, the study of social support emerged to explore how the quantity of relationships available to a given actor is related to this actor’s health. This opened a Pandora box, where the complexities of the network, the plurality of available means to respond to the focal actor’s needs, the diversity of needs, the varying personal dispositions towards responsiveness, and group level expectations and governances all converge into unique forms of social support. This highlights that in studies of social support, the assumptions about the nature of actors (for example, that they are rational, and self-interested) and relationships (for example, that they are necessarily instrumental

exchanges) should be held in check. Rather, the peculiarities of each story of social support that is studied, as it reveals particular forms of social support, provides grounds for refining these assumptions, as their applicability in different configurations of situations, relationship history, and cultural norms shape the social support that is rendered.

1.2.6 A note on social capital

A critical reader might sense that there are many similarities between the discussion of social support and those regarding social capital, a field which has gained prominence recently in management studies in general (Kwon & Adler, 2014). Before moving on to reviewing how entrepreneurship studies have explored the matter of support, a note is in order regarding social capital to differentiate them and firmly position the direction in which this thesis will take the discussion of support.

Lin and Ensel (1989: 383) initially defined social support as “the process (e.g., perception or reception) by which resources in the social structure are brought to bear to meet the functional needs (e.g., instrumental and expressive) in routine and crisis situation”. Here, emphasis is placed on matching the challenging situations faced by a focal actor with resources, which here are broadly defined as forces in the environment that can counter the stressors at hand. In contrast to the above review, relationships are a means for these resources to resolve the stressors. Lin (1999: 30) later progressed into discussions of social capital, defined as “resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions”. This describes a focal actor who stands before a network of relationships, from which resources are extracted to meet objectives, listed as wealth, power, and status (Lin, 1999). Relationships here are economic, political, cultural, or social connections that facilitate these resource flows (Lin, 2008). Adler and Kwon (2002) emphasize, still, that social capital, while pertaining to resources, is a matter of relationships, and not things, drawing attention to network structures that are held together by exchanges that are based on

generating goodwill and solidarity, while also set within market and hierarchical governance structures.

Social support overlaps with social support inasmuch as there is attention towards the relationships and the structure of these amongst themselves in a network (see Kwon and Adler, 2014). Social capital is distinct in that it reaches higher levels of analysis, involving market relations and hierarchical relations beyond the social relations, keeping a strong emphasis on the motivations for extracting resources which are valued relative to some sort of opportunity for advancement (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Kwon & Adler, 2014). In this view, the structure of relationships enhance access to social capital (Burt, Hogarth, & Michaud, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Ryan et al., 2008). Social support is distinct from social capital in that it refers to overcoming distress and promoting well-being through relationships with others (Cohen et al., 2000; Nurallah, 2012; Uchino et al., 2012). Social support also has a view towards the responses of others to the distress that is experienced by the focal actor, drawing attention to supporters' agency within the structure at hand (Fiore, Coppel, Becker, & Cox, 1986; Uehara, 1990; Walker et al., 1993). By drawing attention first and foremost to the relationships, there is space in these discussions for theorizing about the supporter and the rendering of support, beyond the extraction of resources by the focal actor.

1.3 Definitions and discussions of support in entrepreneurship literature

While social support studies place matters of well-being front and center (Cohen et al., 2000; Nurallah, 2012), in entrepreneurship studies of support, the focus is often on firm emergence and survival (for example, Kim, Longest, & Aldrich, 2013; Kotha & George, 2012; Newbert, Tornikoski, & Quigley, 2013). This focus is justified for two reasons. Firstly, there is a tension between well-being and profitability, where preoccupations with well-being could be seen to stand at odds with the process of entrepreneurship (Cardon & Patel, 2015; Przepiorka, 2016). The process

itself is expected to be emotionally harrowing, and profitability is often associated with exposing one's self to such emotionally harrowing situations (Rauch et al., 2018). As described above, emotional challenges should be mitigated so the entrepreneur can best manage their venture (Hessels et al., 2018), but entrepreneurs should also not be encouraged to avoid such unclear, unsettling situations merely for the sake of emotional well-being (Kim et al., 2013), since this could entail failing to embrace the necessary risks in the well-being versus profitability tradeoff (Cardon & Patel, 2015; Shepherd & Cardon, 2009).

Secondly, there is a tendency for emotionally resilient people to self-select into entrepreneurship. Baron et al. (2016) find that many self-employed are less stressed than the general population, which is somewhat at odds with the overall view that the self-employed have, on average, higher stress levels than the general population (Cardon & Patel, 2015). They discuss two mechanisms which are related to entrepreneurs' self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. In one mechanism, when first-time entrepreneurs who are low on these psychological features are faced with great challenges and are overcome by stress, they abandon the practice of entrepreneurship. In the other mechanism, entrepreneurs who are high on these features are attracted to entrepreneurship, confidently embracing uncertainty, and persevere when faced with great challenges. One could easily see that studying needs to mitigate psychological distress as either irrelevant, since entrepreneurs are less vulnerable than the general population, or as a threat to better performance, by encouraging avoidance of a situation that is related to better firm performance overall. Looking towards supportive relationships could, when seen from this vantage point, fail to reach the essence of entrepreneurship.

However, relationality is a key feature of entrepreneurship (for example, Downing, 2005; Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Garud, Gehman, & Giuliani, 2014; Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010). Supporters are key in providing the conditions for entrepreneurs to face the unsettling situations that are inherent to the process (for example, Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998;

Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013) by providing knowledge (for example, Kim et al., 2013) and emotional support (for example, Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Nielsen, 2017) that, ultimately, allow entrepreneurs to be more resilient than the general population and to make better managerial decisions. Therefore, a theory of entrepreneurship should also include relationality at the level of the entrepreneur and their own supporters, beyond discussion of the emergence and performance of entrepreneurs' ventures (Anderson et al., 2012).

1.4 Delineating support to entrepreneurs

Discussions in entrepreneurship that explicitly spotlight support (rather than social capital) as a construct often highlight it as a costly resource that is to be obtained through interactions. As far back as Brüderl and Preisendörfer's (1998) seminal paper on support to entrepreneurs, the matter of cost and benefit is placed as one of the key mechanisms that guides entrepreneurs to seek particular support from a particular supporter. They find that the presence of a support network is indeed associated with firm emergence, and that strong ties had more convincing effects than weak ties in this association. This seminal study virtually set the scene for studies that portray the acquisition of support within an economic, quasi-instrumental, exchange framework. It is echoed in Newbert, Tornikoski, & Quigley's (2013), where the heterogeneity and quantity of ties provides buffers to holdup, keeping resources at accessible "costs".

1.4.1 Relating instrumental and emotional support

Hanlon and Saunders (2007) ratify the importance of resource acquisition in their study of how new startups in Canada value the support efforts they receive. They find that, among the contacts listed by entrepreneurs, a small amount were counted on for a broad range of support efforts. While many of this small circle were family and friends, a considerable amount were more distant and difficult to access. They find that tangible resources, such as financial loans, are costly

for entrepreneurs, so efforts to seek out such support are limited. On the other hand, intangible forms of support, such as advice and general knowledge, are less difficult to attain, and so were sought out more. Good quality resources were found to be more difficult to come by, and so entrepreneurs are faced with a dilemma: to rely on easily accessed and low quality support, or make costly efforts to obtain support of greater reliability. They also reveal that supporters are greatly relied on for intangible support, including emotional support, consistent with the notion reviewed above that social support is more than the attainment of resources. Considering the extremely harrowing situations that entrepreneurs are exposed to such as frustrations (Rauch et al., 2018; Wincent & Örtqvist, 2009), the risk of failure (Shepherd, 2003), and having to handle the tradeoff between overall emotional well-being and profitability (Baron et al., 2016; Cardon & Patel, 2015), this finding becomes less and less surprising. Rather, it seems surprising that extant literature on support to entrepreneurs fails to place greater emphasis on this dimension of support, even though Hanlon and Saunders (2007) put forth the call to do so. For example, Kim et al. (2013) preferred to keep types of support observed at those which are task-focused, and therefore observed only informational and instrumental support. This led to some “surprising” findings, where family members support through task-related advice was seen to be detrimental to entrepreneurs’ persistence. They did not acknowledge how emotional support can counterbalance knowledge of the difficult situation (Shepherd, 2009). Nielsen (2017), in a study of supporters’ rendition of support efforts, shows that, since both forms of support are often provided by the same person at the same time, they should be understood as being embedded within each other. Here, the instrumental exchanges establish routine interactions that foment trust between the entrepreneur and the supporter. This dynamic is analogous to those described by Small and Sukhu (2016). Similarly, Bianchi et al. (2018) and Huang and Knight (2017) propose process models that reveal how trust-fomenting instrumental interactions can both be a basis for positive evaluations of the potential supporters. The processes conceptualized by Huang and Knight (2017) would be

sustained by the entrepreneur's positive evaluation of the potential supporter, sustaining a "slow" deliberation that leads to requesting support. On the other hand, Bianchi et al., (2018) describe a process where the existence of these routine instrumental exchanges establishes situations where these potential supporters are accessible, and are therefore intuitively, "quickly", activated for requesting support.

1.4.2 Support efforts beyond the strict exchange of resources

Although resource acquisition is prevalent in this research stream, it is still quite close to the framework of social support studies. A clear example of this is Hanlon and Saunders' (2007) definition of supporters as actors who "willingly" provide resources. If they provide the resources "willingly", the strict determinism of reciprocity and social structure no longer works as an assumption guiding the theorizing process (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994), and supporters' responsiveness to entrepreneurs' challenging situations comes to the foreground. In other words, by adding the matter of *willingly* providing resources, in the spirit of studies of social support, these studies have a view towards the experience of caring for the entrepreneur, beyond descriptions of resource flows. I will demonstrate the importance of exploring the supporters' own conditions for enabling support in greater detail below when discussing the operationalization of support.

Notable studies in this regard are Nielsen (2017, 2019). Using the Danish Alter Study of Entrepreneurship, a database that shifts attention to supporter, rather than the entrepreneurs, she finds that the provision of necessary resources to entrepreneurs is predicated on the emotional support experienced by these supporters. Providing support to entrepreneurs, here, is an act of what she calls "passing on the good vibes": supporters feel that they are in a safer position to handle their own personal challenges, and therefore experience the possibility of responding to an entrepreneur's need for support as something feasible. Social support, as responsiveness to a challenging need by a focal actor, circulates throughout the network and enables further support.

Therefore, support is both a matter of the existence of relationships connected to entrepreneurs, as well as the connections among these supporters (House, Umberson, et al., 1988; Sapin et al., 2016; Uehara, 1990; Walker et al., 1993).

What remains, then, is studying how the particularity of challenging situations (for example, Cope, 2011; Hayward, Forster, Sarasvathy, Fredrickson, & Hayward, 2010; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011) are met with supporting practices that uphold the relationships throughout the network at hand. To prepare the ground for unpacking these relational underpinnings of social support to entrepreneurs, I review and compare below the dyadic- and network-level mechanisms discussed in general social support studies and in entrepreneurship studies of support.

1.5 THE RELATIONAL DIMENSION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Building on the notion that entrepreneurship is inherently uncertain and rife with setbacks (Rauch et al., 2018), learning processes (Cope, 2011; Shepherd, 2004; Ucbasaran et al., 2003), and risks (Baron et al., 2016), we have shown that entrepreneurs face particular needs for the responses of the people around them to provide access to physical resources (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990), knowledge (Kim et al., 2013), aid in reflecting on the challenges at hand (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), and emotional support (Cope, 2011; Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Nielsen, 2014; Shepherd, 2009). Emotional challenges pervade these needs, as the stressful experience of limitation and frustration can hamper entrepreneurs' efforts to manage their new ventures (Baron et al., 2016; Cardon & Patel, 2015; Hayward et al., 2010). Studies of support in entrepreneurship have begun to show that this support indeed touches on the pervasive emotional challenges faced by entrepreneurs. While the importance of networks to the process of entrepreneurship is well established (see Hoang & Yi, 2015 and Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010 for reviews; see Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007 for a critique), the experience of the relationships that compose these networks is rarely explored (Jack, 2010; see Ibarra, Kilduff, & Tsai, 2005 for a

general critique). As indicated above, social support literature has developed to show the subtle nuances in matching particular needs in particular situational challenges with qualities and experiences in particular relationships that afford particular supportive actions (Agneessens et al., 2006; Small, 2017; Small & Sukhu, 2016; Uehara, 1990; Walker et al., 1993; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). I now review how the particularities in relationships and network configurations have been shown to shape social support, and compare this to findings in support to entrepreneurs in order to find opportunities to transpose the intuitions of relationality in social support to the study of support to entrepreneurs. Here, by bridging these two research streams, we recognize the importance of findings regarding the value of adding, subtracting, and embedding ties, while also remaining mindful of the relational and situational complexities experienced in building relationships.

1.5.1 Dyadic mechanisms in social support

As demonstrated above, social support studies, while in greater or lesser degrees, are mindful of the exchange of resources among actors (Agneessens et al., 2006; Brashears & Quintane, 2018; Wellman & Wortley, 1990), their main discussion revolves around the existence and configuration of relationships around the focal actor (Cohen et al., 2000; House, 1987; Sarason et al., 1983). To discuss social support is first and foremost to discuss how relationships match, or fail to match, the challenges experienced by a focal actor (Walker et al., 1993).

Supportive ties are a function of the strength of the relationship and the access the actors in question have to each other (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). I discuss the matter of these configurations across relationships in a separate section below. Habitually, tie strength is described in such terms as reciprocity, frequency, intensity, following Granovetter's (1973) framework for tie strength, where he demonstrated that the "strength" of weak ties is that they provide focal actors with diverse knowledge in facing the challenge of job seeking. For example, Herz (2015) showed that these correlate well with the support received by German immigrants in the United Kingdom,

adding the crucial insight that access to people, even across borders, is vital in establishing supportive efforts. Wellman and Wortly (1990) found that, when requested to evaluate the strength of ties, respondents look to their experience of emotional support, small services, and companionship. They suggest that the relation is so strong that, basically, to discuss the strength of a tie between two people is the same as discussing the social support experienced in this tie. In their study, the existence of access to a particular supporter was associated by informants to their reception of small and large services (a matter of exchange of resources), and frequency was associated with enhancing ties that were already supportive. However, simply frequent exchanges of resources was not what constituted a support tie for the respondents. Rather, it is the enjoyment that the respondent felt in regards to these matters that establishes this strong relation between the strength of the tie and the experience of support. This points, once more, to the clue that support is related to the perceived desirability of being involved with the actor in need, once again pointing towards the matter of legitimacy (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Suchman, 1995). To discuss social support, we need to grasp the actor's *experience* of the potentially supportive relationship (Small, 2017). Within these experiences, we can garnish matters of the governance of exchanges of resources, as well as other matters, such as the emotional content, responsiveness, and the provision of knowledge through conversation, that constitute the supportive efforts which uphold the relationship (Uehara, 1990).

By looking at the experience, unpleasant events when rendering support also become apparent (House, Umberson, et al., 1988). Although the specific experience with a matter of support rendered to uphold a relationship can be experienced as enjoyable, repeated efforts in this regard can be a source of strain in the relationship as the supporter becomes overloaded with demands (Sapin et al., 2016; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). More than simply a matter of exchanging resources that are costly for the supporter, this is a matter of handling the challenges inherent to relationships. Strong relationships, such as family or close friendships, place actors in situations that are, at times,

harrowing, and prone to misinterpretation, conflicting interest, and simple emotional strain (Agneessens et al., 2006; Uehara, 1990). Different support relationships render different forms of support. For this reason, characterizing the qualitative differences in support rendered, more than simply counting the amount of support relationships, is necessary for adequately studying the relational mechanisms around supporting efforts. Following Uehara's (1990) discussion on social support, Agneessens et al. (2006) relate this differentiation to role expectations, which are the stable behavior in which the focal actor and the supporter in the relationship engage. They suggest that the expectations of support efforts which will be rendered within a particular relationship, and hence, the enjoyment (or conversely, frustration) in regard to these relationships, varies according to the sub-groups and demographics of the actors at hand. Again, this reinforces the need for studies that can grasp the nuances of the experience of support relationships, as well as how these relationships fit within a larger relational context.

In short, the peculiarities of the expectations around these relationships play a part in shaping the support efforts. In line with the notion that support efforts serve the establishment and maintenance of relationships (Jung, 1988; Uehara, 1990), we see that the strength of relationships, as described by actors, is intimately associated with the actors' experience of support efforts within those ties. We look now to the entrepreneurship literature, comparing how support efforts within relationships have been discussed, in order to identify avenues to advance this discussion.

1.5.1.1 Dyadic mechanisms in support to entrepreneurs

In the above review on challenges faced by entrepreneurs, while the need to maintain a flow of resources through the network to the entrepreneur's venture remains a key concern (Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013; Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990), other needs are also present, such as the need for knowledge and reflecting upon challenges (Kim et al., 2013; Kotha & George, 2012), as well as

needs of an emotional nature (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007) as uncertainties and unexpected events can place high pressure on the entrepreneur (Rauch et al., 2018; Wincent & Örtqvist, 2009).

The literature that places support efforts at the heart of the discussion of entrepreneurship emphasize that certain types of relationships, such as family or friendship ties, can streamline these resources to the entrepreneur. Jack et al (2004) emphasized that strong ties are conducive to obtaining support such as this and this in such and such challenges. In fact, Jack (2005) shows evidence that entrepreneurs place high emphasis on their strong ties, mostly turning to close friends and family for all sorts of support, a finding that corroborates the notion that, for informants, the strength of a tie is practically synonymous with the enjoyment of the support efforts received by the focal actor (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). This echoes the notion in social support that role expectations, as embedded within certain sub-groups of a given network and across different demographics (Agneessens et al., 2006; Uehara, 1990), shape the support efforts rendered to the entrepreneur, and reinforces the association of strong ties with support efforts. While these have mapped out the types of relationships and the support gained, there is now room to delve into the relational experiences that link these roles with the support efforts: how do support efforts arise in relationships and feed back into shaping these supportive relationships?

When Newbert and Tornikoski (2013) specifically use exchange theory to theorize their findings, we see a new mechanism added to the relational mechanisms that shape these support efforts: ties that are strong can become too demanding for the entrepreneur in their requirements, which is offset when adding weak ties into the entrepreneur's portfolio of relationships (Newbert et al., 2013). While intuitive in their own discussion, now, compared to the notion discussed above, that support ties are strong ties, it is counterintuitive that weak ties, i.e, those which are experienced as less intense, play a key role in securing social support that is manageable, once again emphasizing the "strength of weak ties". This is probably due to their use of an exchange theory

approach, which can privilege instrumental support, while failing to capture the relational settings around most important form of support, that is, emotional (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007).

Within the literature that targets the high emotional challenges faced by entrepreneurs who are dealing with experiences of failure, there is acknowledgement that relationships are important in managing these situations (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). The matter here is that entrepreneurs require time and efforts to reframe their setbacks (Shepherd et al., 2009), learn from them (Cope, 2011; Shepherd, 2009), and become increasingly resilient so that they can make better decisions in their subsequent efforts and become progressively less vulnerable (Baron et al., 2016; Shepherd, 2003; Ucbasaran et al., 2003). Supporters provide grounds for learning and resilience building by continuing their relationship with the entrepreneur when many other relationships abandon them at a crucial hour (Cope, 2011), and by engaging in conversations where entrepreneurs can actively reframe and reflect on their experience of failure (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). Mostly, however, this literature emphasizes entrepreneurs' cognitive efforts to handle reflection and learning on their own. In this literature, support relationships are mentioned tangentially, as aids to entrepreneurs' cognitive and emotional efforts to handle the situation. Entrepreneurship studies have yet to fully delve into the relational qualities of such support efforts to meet emotionally challenging situations, whether severe or mundane, such as achieved by Small and Sukhu (2016) and Small (2017) regarding social support to doctoral students, remaining at a description of structures where mechanisms are inferred, rather than obtaining a full view of the relational underpinnings through which support emerges.

Entrepreneurs relationally engage their supporters in their challenges. Rawhouser, Villanueva and Newbert (2017), through a comprehensive review of studies regarding resource flows to entrepreneurs, drew up a comprehensive framework that categorizes signaling strategies, entrepreneurs' actions, access to supporters through associations, and types of resources that are provided in supportive efforts. This shows that the entrepreneurial process is more about

communicating across expectations (Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Lounsbury et al., 2019), attempting to signal legitimacy (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002) in an effort to operate culture (Überbacher, 2014; Überbacher et al., 2015).

Rather than see relationships as a means to access resources, Rawhouser et al., (2017) show that support relationships with entrepreneurs is a way for supporters to enhance entrepreneurs' strengths. Their focus is centered around enhancing entrepreneurs' capabilities, rather than how they engage in any specific action that coerces supporters into rendering resources. For them, support is a way to leverage the existing relationships around entrepreneurs, in line with Bianchi et al. (2018) and Huang and Knight (2017), where instrumental support built trusting and sympathy feedback loops that fostered relationships where emotional support could be sought out and obtained. While these are certainly steps in the right direction, more work can be done to empirically demonstrate how support efforts (which include, but are not are not limited to, the provision of resources) reflect and build existing relationships, especially in how these relationships and support efforts are experienced by the actors themselves (Garud et al., 2018; Lounsbury et al., 2019).

1.5.2 Network-level mechanisms in social support

While social support is a matter of one actor being responsive to another actor's needs for support in ways that enhance the actor in need's well-being (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Uchino et al., 1996), the relational mechanisms that enable or hinder social support reach beyond the dyadic level of analysis (Cohen et al., 2000; House, 1987; Nurallah, 2012; Walker et al., 1993). Studies have also looked at the configurations of relationships around a given focal actor, considering the circulation of support efforts throughout this network (Bianchi et al., 2018; Uehara, 1990). This allows for operationalization of the group-level expectations around roles and reciprocity (Agneessens et al., 2006; Brashears & Quintane, 2018; Uehara, 1990), as well as the description of

flows of support (Faber & Wasserman, 2002). Typically, in these studies, these networks are ego-centered, that is, they request that a focal actor describe their own network (Cohen et al., 2000; Walker et al., 1993).

By looking at these aggregations of ties as a network, measures can be taken to characterize their configuration, such as their size (amount of ties) (House, 1987), density (the amount of connection among actors in this network) (Walker et al., 1993), and cliquishness (the extent to which, in this network any given actor is connected to highly interconnected actors) (Martí, Bolívar, & Lozares, 2017). Observing the network level of analysis in support relationships also allows observation of a particular actor's position within this network relative to the others, with such features as centrality (the amount of ties connected to an actor), and similarities among actors (Walker et al., 1993). These nuanced positions of actors and overall characteristics of the network show that it is more than the size of the network—that is, the amount of people involved in the network and the amount of relationships among them—but rather the qualitatively different relationships and patterns of relationships at hand (Faber & Wasserman, 2002; Walker et al., 1993). Just like different roles and relationships are associated with different forms of support efforts, different patterns in the network are associated with the availability of different types of support efforts, as well as the consistency of support efforts and overall effects of such support efforts on well-being (for example, Herz, 2015; Martí et al., 2017; Sapin et al., 2016; Wellman & Wortley, 1990).

A matter of structure that has proved to be insightful in both social support and social capital literature is the matter of bridging and bonding (Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1988). A bridging network is one that has sub-groups between which the focal actor serves as a “bridge”. On the other hand, bonding networks are those that surround the focal actor with densely interconnected relationships. For example, in a study of family support to patients with psychiatric conditions, Sapin et al.(2016) found that these structures have unique effects on the support efforts rendered to the focal actor

and their experience as the object of these efforts. In bonding networks, the focal actor often feels that their needs are looked after and experiences decreases in stress and the magnitude of life challenges, although they experience overlap in the conflict network because of the difficulties inherent to strong, intense relationships. In bridging networks, these overlaps are less prominent, and focal actors experience greater balance between giving and receiving support.

Such an aggregated view of the relationships can reveal the nuances in group formation, and along with this, the emerging role expectations that are unique to the different sub-groups (Brashears & Quintane, 2018; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Along these lines, in this same study of support to people with psychiatric conditions, Sapin et al. (2016) found other patterns, alongside bridging and bonding. In one, which they term “overload”, the focal actor, although facing needs, is requested to support family members, becoming overloaded from their central position in these networks. They also found that a focal actor who was central in the support network, although receiving support efforts in the face of their needs, experienced high stress because this central position emphasized to them that they were a burden to their families when there was high conflict.

In social support literature, the social complexities of the relationships surrounding the focal actor in need come to the foreground (Cohen et al., 2000; Nurallah, 2012; Walker et al., 1993). We see that the discussion has progressed beyond observing the strength of the tie, and into actors’ experiences of being set within a particular structure of relationships (Wellman & Wortley, 1990), with particular role expectations (Agneessens et al., 2006), and unique support possibilities shaped by forces that are exogenous to any particular dyadic support relationship (Uchino et al., 2012; Uehara, 1990). What remains now is to survey how entrepreneurship literature has discussed these network mechanisms that enable and shape support.

1.5.2.1 Network-level mechanisms in support to entrepreneurs

Within entrepreneurship literature, it is clear that support efforts come from a small subgroup of their connections (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Jack, Dodd, & Anderson, 2004). Here, the strength of the tie no longer is necessarily conflated with enjoyment of the received support efforts (Walker et al., 1993) because these ties can be firmly characterized as ties to the entrepreneur's venture, instead of necessarily being personal relationships cultivated by entrepreneurs themselves (Hite & Hesterly, 2001; Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010). Additionally, not all personal relationships are involved in the matters pertaining to the entrepreneur's efforts in the role of an entrepreneur, instead being a matter of mutual support in other life challenges (McKeever et al., 2015; Pollack et al., 2012). Therefore, when looking at entrepreneurs' support networks, it is important to understand how this sub-network stands in relation to the wider network at hand, be it as a personal network embedded in an entrepreneurial ecosystem (Renzulli & Aldrich, 2005; Spigel, 2017), or a specific support network within personal relationships (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007).

The surrounding network of relationships around entrepreneurs plays a crucial role in leading them through challenges. First of all, people who decide to initiate entrepreneurial activities typically are surrounded by entrepreneurs. For example, Hansen (1995) found that a simple count of the amount of support relationships around a budding entrepreneur is positively associated with firm emergence, and that the density of these relationships enhanced this association. Similarly, in a study following a mentoring program at a business school, Radu Lefebvre and Redien-Collot (2013) found that students who became entrepreneurs in the mentoring program came from families of entrepreneurs. Interestingly, there were also students who did not come from such families, and yet still made the transition. This transition was facilitated by first inspiring them through the mentoring program to start considering entrepreneurship as a viable career choice, and then engaging them in internships in startups where they could develop relationships with peers and role

models, effectively surrounding themselves with a network that was conducive to transitioning into the role of an entrepreneur.

Adding to the discussion of dyadic mechanisms in attaining resources, Newbert et al. (2013) also emphasize the importance of embeddedness in these support networks in generating streams of resources to the entrepreneur. Alongside the intensity of a given relationship, the scarcity of other options to call upon can lead an entrepreneur to be exposed to high demands from their supporters in exchange for the resources they offer. Adding more relationships to their portfolio of supporters allows entrepreneurs more options for requesting support and avoid overloading supporters with requests (Arregle et al., 2015). Conversely, they find that making efforts to connect supporters with other supporters facilitated the flow of resources to the entrepreneur because the added supporter would gain knowledge about the entrepreneur's emerging firm from other supporters, forming what sociology literature refers to as "bonding" networks (Coleman, 1988; Sapin et al., 2016). However, they do not explore supporters' experience in assuming these different positions in the network to further discuss their agency in these relationships, leaving this to assumptions reminiscent of social exchange theory.

Beyond the exchange of resources, networks have been shown to be relevant to emotional challenges faced by entrepreneurs. Consider, for example, the matter of withdrawal from entrepreneurial activities. This has been associated with depression, which in turn is derived from the stress of being in such an uncertain, unsettling activity as entrepreneurship (Cardon & Patel, 2015; Wincent & Örtqvist, 2009). This is the mechanism that ultimately selects out the emotionally less resilient, making the overall population of entrepreneurs to be more resilient than the general population (Baron et al., 2016). However, support networks, even when measured as a simple count of the number of support relationships sought out by the entrepreneur, was shown to be a successful buffer to depression in entrepreneurs, thereby weakening the link between stress and intention to withdraw (Pollack et al., 2012; Rauch et al., 2018).

Much like the discussions on social support, discussion in entrepreneurship regarding support have drawn insights about support networks from the accounts rendered by those in need. These discussions are often able to draw insights even from simple counts of ties (for example, Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998; Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Kotha & George, 2012). I believe that this preference to focus on entrepreneurs' networks stems from the fact that entrepreneurship is a subset of issues in a focal actor's life challenges (Welter et al., 2017), coupled with entrepreneurship studies' preference to showcase the entrepreneur as the main agent (Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007). While social support discussions at times have seen particular actors as both someone who renders and receives support efforts, because members of support networks face all sorts of life challenges together (for example, Sapin, Widmer, & Iglesias, 2016; Uehara, 1990), entrepreneurship support discussions see actors who face particular challenges in one certain life domain, challenges which their supporters do not necessarily also face.

Entrepreneurship studies, therefore, have a simplicity that overcomes some of the messiness in highly reciprocal support networks and can provide insights into how support networks form around a focal actor and how support efforts are shaped by this network. However, by remaining centered on a focal actor (that is, the entrepreneur) who is the object of social support and who does not necessarily respond with support efforts, we are left with a portrait of a network of supporters that leaves these supporters' motivations opaque: we do not know what motivates a supporter to participate in such a network, submitting themselves to the expectation that they will indeed make supporting efforts.

An overarching construct has been suggested to be a key motivator in leading supporters to support: legitimacy (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Suchman, 1995; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). I have shown above how the discussion of social support has entry points where legitimacy does, indeed, seem to play a role. In the subsequent portion of this introductory chapter, I review the relationship between legitimacy and support networks and stress

the need to observe socio-psychological conditions that facilitate supporters' judgements of legitimacy and, therefore, underpin the conditions for supporting entrepreneurs.

1.6 RUSHING IN: ON THE SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGY OF LEGITIMACY JUDGEMENTS

When an entrepreneur sets out to engage potential supporters, they send out signals that vouch for the legitimacy of their project (Germain, 2017). This places the potential supporter in a position to decide: do I, or do I not, support this entrepreneur in developing their project? While extant literature has largely explored the many ways that entrepreneurs signal the legitimacy of their endeavor to potential and existing supporters, we still know very little about the supporters' reasons for responding to signals (see Überbacher [2014], for a review). Therefore, I shift the attention away from entrepreneurs' efforts to gain and signal legitimacy (Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Lounsbury et al., 2019), and towards supporters' reasons for engaging with entrepreneurs' projects. I focus on why different potential supporters are more ready to assess certain projects as more legitimate than other projects, while yet other potential supporters might be more prone to positively evaluate the legitimacy of still other projects.

Potential supporters' assessments of the legitimacy of a project for receiving support is taxed by the lack of available information about the project at hand (Bitektine, 2011), and therefore, they rely on heuristics that are bound by assumptions, generalized impressions, and affect (Tost, 2011). The sense that a given project is legitimate is, as Suchman classically put it, is a "generalized perception or assumption" (1995: 574). Such an impression is drawn from the potential supporters' understanding of social norms and expectations (Fisher, Kuratko, Bloodgood, & Hornsby, 2017), which can be conflicting, even contradictory, amongst themselves (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Hervieux, Gedajlovic, & Turcotte, 2010). This has been shown to have a relational, affective component, as such alignment with social norms and expectations can be inferred from the given

project's relationship with other, similar projects (Haack, Pfarrer, & Scherer, 2014). O'Neil and Ucbasaran (2016) emphasized that positive assessments of legitimacy come from the crossing of the entrepreneur's main interests with the supporter's, and that, therefore, support has to come from an interpersonal encounter that makes sense to the supporter.

However, such explanations do not grasp the pre-conscious, intersubjective mental processes that also bring a supporter to assess that a given project is legitimate. Although recognition has been made that supporters are not a homogeneous audience (for example, Tost, 2011; Überbacher, 2014; Überbacher, Jacobs, & Cornelissen, 2015), the mechanisms that underlie this heterogeneity are still unexplored: extant literature does not yet inquire about the supporters' excitement by unpacking their interests, cognitive frameworks, and critiques of the institutionalized, field-level, references for assessing legitimacy. This is due to the focus on signaling efforts, and failure to inquire into potential supporters' experience in receiving such signals. For all the entrepreneurs' efforts to build relationships, there is *something* that translates a given signaling effort into a supporter's "generalized perception" of appropriateness of the project.

1.6.1 The de-energizing challenge of assessing legitimacy

Legitimacy is built "in the eyes of the beholder" (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002: 416; see also Bitektine & Haack, 2015). Suchman (1995) suggests that entrepreneurs who are seeking entrance to existing markets are faced with the challenge of creating new alliances by convincing the legitimate incumbents to support them. Lawrence & Suddaby (2006: 236) indicate that such actions "reconstitute actors and reconfigure relationships between actors". Definitions of legitimacy commonly emphasize that there is a system of expectations that is socially established—though not necessarily communicated explicitly or formally (Suchman, 1995). These expectations are used to judge the actor or their actions as they are deemed (un)fitting for the group (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002), as social acceptability is "bestowed" upon them (Zajac &

Washington, 2005: 284). Detailed taxonomies of legitimacy have been composed by Aldrich and Fiol (1994) and Suchman (1995).

Suchman's (1995: 574) seminal definition of legitimacy comes with an emphasis on its decoupling from the individual's own convictions. The "generalized" notion, in this view, would make the legitimacy held by a given project resilient to specific, idiosyncratic situations that might be experienced by the potential supporter. This recognizes that the potential supporter has their own subjective critique of what is acceptable and desirable (or not), but that this in some way is submitted to a more general, socially acceptable notion of what is, indeed, legitimate. While this might, in an overarching institutional logic, stabilize the terms upon which legitimacy is conferred, it certainly introduces a tension that is far from trivial at micro levels, such as relationships and affective experiences (Jarvis, 2017).

When a supporter supports an entrepreneur's project, they are endorsing both the project itself and what it stands for (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Tost, 2011). They are faced with the question, therefore, of whether being associated with this project will be somehow beneficial for their own expectations of their own position in the social surroundings. If this project is desirable and appropriate, it is worthwhile to be associated with it. Any support, to some degree, passes through this assessment because of the possible loss or gain according to the position the supporter already occupies in the ecosystem. On this point, Überbacher (2014) introduces the notion that the project conforms to a structural context, that is, how many players are involved, and how they interact with each other, generating what he calls grounds for "ecological legitimacy". There would be a social cost for supporting something that is less than legitimate, or for failing to support something that is legitimate. This triggers, at a personal level, a sense of misgivings, a "neural alarm system" (Tost, 2011: 700). Potential supporters are subject to social control mechanisms and can be "silenced", that is, refrain from making in public (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Creed, Hudson, Okhuysen, & Smith-Crowe, 2014).

So far, it would seem that many supporters begrudgingly support projects—an uncomfortable situation which, of course, everyone has experienced at some point or another (Jarvis, 2017). But ever so often, potential supporters feel a “rush” and support projects enthusiastically, rather than begrudgingly (Voronov & Weber, 2016). What to say of the times that a project gets supporters to willfully “go the extra mile” and render all manners of available support for a particular cause (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007)? If entrepreneurs create projects with the resources of others (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990), why do these “others” agree to support the entrepreneur’s project? It is here that the relational practices between entrepreneurs and potential supporters become so important. After all, the experience of the relationships with supporters have been posited to be vital in securing flows of resources to entrepreneurs (Huang & Knight, 2017). If there is a distance between what the potential supporter experiences as a social norm and what they believe is actually acceptable and desirable, the relationship can provide space for the conflict in terms for legitimacy to be resolved on a smaller scale, giving space for the experience of a rush that prompts the potential supporter to enthusiastically support what they feel is a truly distinguishing and potentially winning project (Anderson & Smith, 2007; Goss, 2005).

When potential supporters choose to support by willingly providing resources, contact with other actors in the network, advice, emotional support, and so on, they are supporters (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007). In short, supporters are evaluators who willingly engage with entrepreneurs and their projects. Because new iterations of support are always possible, but not guaranteed, every existing supporter is assumed to also be a potential supporter for the next iteration, where support could be denied, but obviously not all potential supporters are assumed to have been supporters previously.

1.6.2 Assessments of legitimacy have an affective component

That there is an affective basis for making positive evaluations should come as no particular surprise, since it is a phenomenon long recognized in experimental psychology (for example, Forgas, 2015; Forgas & George, 2001). Yet, there is still a lack of exploration in extant literature of the potential supporter's experience in positively evaluating the legitimacy of an entrepreneur's project. Extant literature fails to take into account the individual supporter's critical experience of overarching norms and how these play out in their own relationships, such as expectations in regards to people who have similar characteristics as theirs or who participate in certain routines that are embedded in the social structure (Goss, 2010; Lok, Creed, DeJordy, & Voronov, 2017; Voronov & Weber, 2016). The idiosyncrasies of the network of relationships in which the entrepreneur is involved are left unaddressed when discussing how supporters interact with entrepreneurs (for example, Hwang & Powell, 2005; Powell & Oberg, 2017).

Such a shift in level of analysis to include relational and affective dimensions in legitimacy assessments would reflect general movements seen in the discussion of institutions and agents (for example, Cardinale, 2018). This shift began with nudges, such as when Lounsbury (2008) underscored that understanding of the actors and their relationships has been underdeveloped. These actors, he argues, are the vantage points from where the overarching contexts are articulated pragmatically, and understanding the struggles they face and articulate will reveal more of how the social space is established. Similarly, Suddaby (2010: 17) stated that the absence of an actor-centered discussion is "somewhat surprising", since the overarching context around actors is understood to be one of cognition, which actors interpret and by which they are influenced. This has developed into lively discussions about the role of emotions and how their displays are conditioned by the institutional settings where they happen as mediated by an ethos (Voronov & Weber, 2016), and critiques drawing attention to the limits of the place of alignment of emotional signals and emotional states (Lindebaum & Ashkanasy, 2017), the need to keep theoretical

simplicity while exploring new approaches in these discussions (Toubiana, Greenwood, & Zietsma, 2017), and the urgency of keeping an emphasis on a given actor's situation at the crossroads of emotions, ethos, and institutional logics (Voronov & Weber, 2017). A similar discussion revived the questions of agency as embedded within social structures to find both pre-reflective bases for agency as well as how certain possibilities of resolutions of institutional challenges are privileged over others (Cardinale, 2018), leading to a discussion of what can be gained theoretically by toggling across levels of analysis (Harmon, Haack, & Roulet, 2019) and the significance of embeddedness within a theory of agency (Lok & Willmott, 2019). I seek here to bring this new-found complexity, stemming from a view towards agency (Cardinale, 2018; Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Hwang & Colyvas, 2020; Voronov & Weber, 2016), to find what can "realistically" be said (and that has remained opaque until now) regarding legitimacy assessments made by supporters (Lok & Willmott, 2019: 473).

As strongly stressed by Hjorth (2007), the supporters of entrepreneurs are not abstractions, but rather are real people who are enmeshed in their own subjectivity (see also de Clercq & Voronov, 2009). However, we do not know what the subjective bases are that triggers the supporter to support the entrepreneur's project. For all the efforts to build relationships, what facilitates the fact that certain signals are the ones that render a "general sense" of legitimacy? As I suggest above, the terms for this are set within the relationship, that is, how the relationship articulates the notion of acceptability (Tost, 2011). The mechanism I look at in this thesis is decidedly at the micro level, although legitimacy is a cross-level construct (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). This is a return to the structural view of society espoused by Berger and Luckmann's (1966) intuition that the social construction of reality begins at the face-to-face encounter. Recent literature regarding legitimacy assessments has moved in this direction by discussing the techniques used by entrepreneurs to convince potential supporters of the legitimacy of their project (for example, Bitektine & Haack, 2015). These studies still keep their focus on the entrepreneurs' actions, without inquiring about

the supporters' interests, cognitive frameworks, and relationships with the institutionalized references for assessing legitimacy (Bitektine, 2011; Fisher et al., 2017; Überbacher, 2014). Therefore, rationalistic mechanisms, such as cognitive legitimacy, should be seen as having subjective, pre-conscious, affective basis (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002).

1.6.3 Relational underpinnings of legitimacy

Under unclear conditions, where not all information is available, potential supporters evaluate how desirable an entrepreneur's project is by articulating common understandings throughout their relationships that emerged from their repeated interactions. The potential supporter's understanding of legitimacy is a precursor for support (Bitektine, 2011). Once legitimacy is granted, it serves as a stake for securing support. Potential supporters observe both the reputation of the founders (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2012) and of the endeavor (Hallen, 2008), verifying if it is "legitimate" throughout their network. The entrepreneur signals appropriateness through credentials that are locally relevant (Nagy, Pollack, Rutherford, & Lohrke, 2012). Even the choice of words is vital for signaling accordance with meanings at hand (Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014). We see, here, that the surrounding culture, as a set of heuristics and expectations within and around relationships, is central for support to entrepreneurs to become a reality (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2018; Lounsbury et al., 2019; Überbacher et al., 2015).

Although the judgement is derived from a generalized notion, (that is, experienced as impersonal), the importance of how the given project serves the potential supporter's interest is not to be taken lightly. As Tost put it (p. 690), "entities are judged to be legitimate when perceived as promoting the material interests of the individual". Because legitimacy assessments are a generalized perception or assumption, they have a pre-conscious component (Haack et al., 2014; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). In the words, again, of Suchman (1995: 574), this "subjectively created", pre-conscious, heuristic-laden, affective assessment is "socially constructed" (see also

Daudigeos, 2013), hence this component should have an intersubjective portion to it (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Ultimately, even though the terms for the assessment are to be found in the social surroundings where entrepreneurs and supporters are embedded, that is, institutional fields, social ties, logics, institutions, etc., the choice to support happens between the entrepreneur and the potential supporter, that is, the person seeking support and the person making an assessment, while embedded within this social system (Cardinale, 2019; Harmon et al., 2019; Lok & Willmott, 2019). Therefore, we look to the supporter, starting with the assumption that they are social agents seeking to enhance their experience within their own social setting by actively rendering support to entrepreneurs (Brown, Arnold, Fletcher, & Standage, 2017; Methot, Rosado-Solomon, & Allen, 2018; Obstfeld, 2005). From this insight, we seek to understand what the bases for positive assessments of legitimacy are, and hence untangle the matter of why certain potential supporters are more responsive than others to entrepreneurs' displays of need for support (Hwang & Colyvas, *in press*).

When legitimacy is treated as an objective resource possessed by the entrepreneur's project, one can have the impression that the terms supporters call upon to evaluate legitimacy are fairly settled, agreed upon, and homogeneous. When the ecosystem is fairly stable (Bitektine & Haack, 2015), or when the network is quite dense around the potential supporter (Bitektine, 2011), these terms should, indeed, tend to be similar (DiMaggio, Sotoudeh, Goldberg, & Shepherd, 2017). However, such stability should not be taken for granted, or even expected (Padgett & Powell, 2012; Smith & Besharov, 2019). On the contrary, contradictions can emerge as new actors are added, tipping points are found, and shocks strike the ecosystem (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Methot et al., 2018; Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, & Do, 2018). Supporters often stand at the crossroads to these dynamic shocks, where they experience opposing, contradictory logics (Hervieux et al., 2010) because they transition through several areas of the network (Fisher et al., 2017), connecting groups that otherwise would be unconnected and experiencing stress as they try to participate in different

groups (Batjargal et al., 2013; Obstfeld, 2005; Powell & Oberg, 2017). This experience is de-energizing, inasmuch as they put energy into handling the disjoint as they seek to secure their position (Cullen, Gerbasi, & Chrobot-Mason, 2018; Xiao & Tsui, 2007). After all, the way people feel about a given situation is a fundamental driver for self-adaptive behavior, especially in uncertain environments (Spreitzer et al., 2005). This is resolved in interaction with people (Cardon, Post, & Forster, 2017; Quinn & Dutton, 2005). Supporters look to entrepreneurs, who are the cultural operators that develop projects situated within the network, to resolve these contradictory tensions (Navis & Glynn, 2011).

Through this review of the role of legitimacy in engaging supporters, I have circled back to the central role of relationships and the experience of being in relationships, in securing support. First of all, I have shown that entrepreneurship literature is quite mindful of challenges that tacit support, beyond the provision of resources, entail to entrepreneurs as they face unsettling, unclear situations. Subsequently, I have shown that entrepreneurship literature has followed discussions in sociology inasmuch as it has explored sets of relationships around entrepreneurs, but has not followed suit in exploring the qualitative experiences of these relationships, or how these relationships are set within a wider relational context. This is particularly problematic when we consider that the clearest feature that secures support as a response to entrepreneurs' needs is a judgement of legitimacy both of the entrepreneurs' project and the possible support efforts. On the other end, we see that legitimacy judgements have predominantly been discussed at a macro (cultural and institutional) level, in need of grounding these judgements in relational contexts. Therefore, the presentation seeks to fill in this gap between support networks on the one hand and legitimacy judgements on the other.

To this end, chapter III tests the importance of supporters' own relationships in enabling support to entrepreneurs, introducing the relational structure we refer to as "support paths". These are triads of relationships that connect entrepreneurs, supporters, and third parties. The

relationships that comprise these support paths are particularly central to entrepreneurs' and supporters' narratives of supporting and being supported. Having established that these support paths, in fact, enable support, chapter IV deepens the description of this phenomenon by delving deeper in the experience of being in these relationships, showing a process that draws actors together in a general experience of homophily. Chapter V both tests these findings by drastically changing the empirical setting and exploring the relational challenges in a community that can disrupt or enable such support, finding that these harmonious support relationships emerge against a backdrop of relational ambiguity and conflicting cultures. I then conclude, in chapter VI, with considerations around how legitimacy judgements arise out of resolution of such ambiguity and conflicting cultures, where these relationships along support paths provide supporters with an experience of learning and enhanced vitality. I find that these socio-psychological processes around supporting entrepreneurs, as grounded in relationships around supporters and enhancing legitimacy of the support, allow supporters to thrive.

I break away from the use of questionnaires to investigate social support to entrepreneurs and use phenomenological interviews and ethnography to perform interpretivist analyses around informants' stories of their experiences (Germain & Laifi, 2018). The following chapter, therefore, reviews and compares methods to operationalize social support in sociological studies and studies in entrepreneurship. This review and comparison reveals why entrepreneurship literature's current studies do not capture these relational dynamics and justify the methods employed in the following empirical chapters.

Chapter 2

Methodology: Operationalizing Support

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2.0 THE CHALLENGE OF “HOW”

Having compared the mechanisms discussed in social support literature in general with the discussions of support to entrepreneurs, I now look to the methodological matters in operationalizing social support. My objective is to look beyond theoretical gaps identified above and find the means to fully explore these gaps. Until this point, I have discussed *what* needs to be discussed, and now I turn to discussing *how* this discussion can be advanced. In this exploratory comparison, I identify ways to advance the discussion of support to entrepreneurs, specifically highlighting a) the need for interpretivist approaches that access the experience of rendering support to entrepreneurs, and b) the need to extend inquiry away from entrepreneurs and into supporters’ unique experience in rendering support to entrepreneurs, as embedded within a network.

This revision in Chapter I has shown that the surrounding structure of relationships is a fundamental matter in social support, and that entrepreneurship studies have only recently begun to sample beyond the entrepreneurs to capture matters regarding indirect relationships. The review has also shown that the experience of support is fundamental in the effectiveness of the support,

but that the experience of entrepreneurs in distress has focused on entrepreneurs' cognitive and emotional experience, with only tangential attention given to their experiences of their relationships. Conversely, studies that have focused on relationships have not delved into the experience of support. On the other hand, other studies have emphasized entrepreneurs' use of culture to influence potential supporters' judgements of their legitimacy. Similarly, though, the relational experiences where these operations of culture occur have not been explored. Here, I review the underpinnings of the extant literature that have shaped the insights reviewed so far, and show that a shift is in order towards supporters. Likewise, this comparative review of operationalization of support in social support literature and entrepreneurship literature will underscore the need to shift research methods away from questionnaires and towards interpretivist approaches that explore actors' experience in the receiving and rendering of support.

I then compare how extant literature in sociology has operationalized social support with how studies in entrepreneurship have operationalized this phenomenon, revealing the need to delve deeper into the experience of the actors who support and are supported by approaching it phenomenologically, rather than relying on questionnaires.

2.1 OPERATIONALIZING SOCIAL SUPPORT

Studies of social support often use questionnaires to garnish information regarding the existence of relationships, and the connections amongst these (for example, Herz, 2015; Martí, Bolívar, & Lozares, 2017; Small & Sukhu, 2016). On the one hand, care is often taken to delineate the types of support efforts rendered (for example, Brashears & Quintane, 2018), and to ask who respondents can go to in order to obtain such support efforts (for example, Agneessens, Waeye, & Lievens, 2006; van der Poel, 1993). On the other hand, these seek ways to catch nuances in these relationships on such matters as relational structure (for example, Martí et al., 2017), expectations and roles (for example, Small & Sukhu, 2016), and means of access (for example, Herz, 2015).

Often in these questionnaires, respondents are presented with a list of possible needs and support efforts that supporters can render, following a structure of “who do you go to for...?” or “who do you talk to about...?” These lists seek to translate the technical jargon of instrumental or emotional support into proxies that respondents can easily identify, such as “when they feel the need to talk to someone”, “aid when they are sick”, or “when they needed to borrow money”, “to spend free time with”, and so on (for example, Agneessens et al., 2006; Herz, 2015; Small & Sukhu, 2016). While these are insightful in their own right, these questions are plagued by respondents’ tendency to list only those relationships with people who are emotionally important, and so fail to achieve a full view of respondents’ networks (Berán et al., 2018). To avoid falling into the trap of conflating strong ties with the full range of social support, Brashears and Quintane (2018) suggest adding a repetition of the questions using the modal verb “could”, that is, “who *could* you...?”. These questionnaires are highly recommended to include questions that can allow for differentiation of the relationships other than simply counting how many relationships are available, in such matters as tie strength, type of tie (including type of kinship), closeness, and similarity between supporters and focal actor (Walker, Wasserman, & Wellman, 1993; see also Agneessens et al., 2006). Large-scale surveys that are often relied on are the “General Social Survey” (for example, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006) and the “Connected Lives” survey (Wellman et al., 2006).

Large-scale data collection efforts have proved to be of great use in these studies. The East York study, for example, was a survey with over eight hundred respondents, followed up with twenty-nine interviews, which lasted from ten to fifteen hours, with randomly selected informants. From this, Wellman and Wortley (1990) were able to obtain quantitative data regarding the types of support rendered, as well as subtleties in the manner in which support efforts are sought out, received, and rendered according to different roles people played out. Support was tracked along such dimensions as emotional aid, small services (for example, lending and giving small household

items, aid in dealing with organizations), large services (for example, major repairs or household work, child care), financial aid, and companionship. To generate the list of supporters, informants were asked to list both people they “feel are closest to [them] outside [their] home”, generating what they call an intimate network, and people who “are in touch [with them] in [their] daily life and who are significant in [their] life” (pg. 562), generating the significant network. From this, they are able to observe two levels of intimacy.

Similarly, Uehara (1990) uses interviews to track seventeen cases with low-income African American women in a neighborhood in Chicago on support upon experiencing job loss. Different from the East York study, where sampling was random, these informants were sampled through the snowball technique, asking neighborhood contacts for recommendations of possible informants, which rendered the seventeen cases. After interviewing the focal person who faced job loss, the data collection team interviewed the people in these networks, rendering 140 informants that spanned across Chicago. From these multiple perspectives, the author is able to tease out complex patterns of exchange around generalized and restricted reciprocity, how network structure relates to these, and the processes through which these exchanges play out. This is made possible because they do not restrict themselves to focal actors’ experience of the social support and extend the inquiry to the wider network.

Such insights have also been captured in interviews that explore the experience that focal actors have in seeking for and receiving support efforts (Bernhard, 2016a, 2018; Small, 2017). Rather than try to overcome or eliminate recall biases, narrative techniques have been suggested to be useful in delving into focal actors’ experiences, thereby unpacking intricacies in relating relationships, structures, roles, and support efforts. Here, the interview is taken as a means for the interviewee to problematize their own identity as embedded within a given social structure, and then to resolve this through storytelling (Bernhard, 2016b). This is turn to an interpretivist framework is appropriate, given the importance of the experience of support efforts in composing

social support as something that enhances well-being, where the enjoyment of the received support efforts characterize the support as supportive and the relationship as close and reliable (Uchino, 2009; Uchino et al., 1996; Walker et al., 1993). By breaking down the interview into stories, analysts are able to track subtle changes in the relationships surrounding the interviewee and how these affect the way they are positioned within and against each other in facing particular challenging situations, as illustrated in Bernhard's (2016b, 2018) cross-case analyses of transitions into self-employment as a means to escape unemployment. Small (2017) accompanied doctoral students in three different universities, performing interviews in several waves and tracking who they called upon to handle their challenges. From this, a detailed taxonomy of support needs were derived, alongside several mechanisms that facilitated the search for and rendering of support efforts that emphasized the role of proximity through accessibility to potential supporters through particular shared challenging situations. By asking about incidents of confiding into supporters alongside a name generator inspired on the General Social Survey, he was able to show that the list of confidants interviewees give does not match the list of people whom interviewees actually sought out. Rather than treat this as a bias that should be eliminated, this discrepancy is treated as information about the way interviewees experience the support they seek out and receive.

Qualitative Structural Analysis (QSA) (Herz et al., 2014), a similar technique that delves into narratives, brings relational structures to the foreground. It is a helpful technique for analyzing interviews because it starts with a particular structure of relationships that the analyst wishes to understand better. In a nutshell, after choosing a particular structure of interest, the analyst finds accounts regarding these structures in the interviews. Then, the analyst delves into the content of the interview by raising questions derived from the content itself. As a phenomenological approach, this allows a deep analysis of the experience of being set within this particular relational setting and is the method of choice used in chapter IV of the present thesis.

From this review, we see that social support studies can range in their operationalization, from highly measurable data obtained through direct questions to deep interpretive analyses of interviewees' experiences. These studies are mindful of varying levels of intimacy and seek to characterize the peculiarities of the challenges in which support is sought out. On the one side, more measurable data allows for clear association of roles and structures to particular types of support, in general terms. The interpretivist approaches, on the other hand, sacrifice the somewhat clear-cut associations and general findings for fine-grained accounts of detailed intricacies within the experiences of the actors involved in social support. It is clear that in these studies relationships and support efforts to maintain these relationships remain front and center (for a review, see Uchino, Bowen, Carlisle, & Birmingham, 2012). I now turn to the operationalization of support in discussions of support to entrepreneurs and compare these with the above reviewed practices, revealing the shortcomings of the approaches used so far in entrepreneurship discussions and the need to employ qualitative, interpretivist methods that grasp the experience of support.

2.1.1 Operationalizing support to entrepreneurs

2.1.1.1 The use of questionnaires and their limitations

With the exception of Nielsen (2017, 2019) and Klyver (2011), studies on social support to entrepreneurs consult only the entrepreneurs on their relationships. Questionnaires are widely used to measure matters of entrepreneurs' needs for support, the content of support efforts rendered to entrepreneurs, and the way they describe the relationships through which these support efforts occur, as in Cardon and Patel's (2015) study of the trade-off entrepreneurs face between striving to make a profit and cultivating well-being (or avoiding stress), and as in Hessels, Rietveld, Thurik, and van der Zwan's (2018) study revealing the association of depression with entrepreneurial exit. Such data obtained through questionnaires can delve into the complexities of the phenomenon of social support to entrepreneurs through Structural Equation Modeling, such as Wincent and

Örtqvist's (2009) study of social context, skill sets and available technologies, role stress, and support, and de Mol, Ho, and Pollack's (2018) study of burnout, job fit perceptions, harmonious passion, destiny beliefs, and obsessive passion. This complexity, however, is achieved among the constructs, and leave the experience of support opaque.

The Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics, or PSED-I (Reynolds, 2001), has been of great use in beginning a discussion of support to entrepreneurs. These panel studies consist of longitudinal data obtained through yearly structured phone interviews with entrepreneurs regarding the activities actors carried out, the nature of their efforts to start their firms, and personal characteristics. The PSED-I provides a fairly comprehensive list of nine possible support efforts to entrepreneurs, all of which describe challenges in the entrepreneurial process in some fashion, such as business services, introduction to other people, moral or emotional support, and personal services. Studies that use the PSED-I aggregate this list according to the given theoretical framework and research interest. For example, Kim et al. (2013) focus on task-related matters because they see this as a key feature of entrepreneurship, and sort these support efforts into two categories, “instrumental” and “informational”. Kotha and George (2012), however, keep mindful of the importance of personal challenges in the matter of social support, and therefore sort these support efforts into “professional resources” and “personal resources”. Similarly, Newbert and Tornikoski (2012) collapse these into “information”, “capital”, and “emotional support”. Drawing on Holschuh and Segal (2002), a study of support to people facing severe mental illness, Newbert et al. (2013) look towards multiplexity, which is the capacity of a given relationship to take on multiple purposes. To this end, they simply include a count of how many of these nine efforts were provided by supporters in their calculation of tie strength, alongside the characterization of each supporter’s role and frequency of their interaction with the entrepreneur. As a comprehensive list of support efforts and of possible roles played by actors in an entrepreneur’s personal network, these studies provide insights that are comparable to those associating roles with support efforts in

other life challenges, such as Agneessens et al. (2006), Uehara (1990), and Wellman and Wortley (1990).

This is a step in the direction that Rawhouser et al. (2017) call for, where certain resources are expected to flow from only certain supporters. However, insight into the usefulness of support effort—or, in the terms of the above review, how enjoyable it was—has yet to be explored (Kim et al., 2013). Nielsen (2017) draws attention to the limited perspective entrepreneurs have of the support they receive, specifically stating that, since instrumental and emotional support are often provided by the same person at the same time, the entrepreneur simply does not have the full view of the experience the supporter has in weaving these types of support together as a response to a given situation. She addresses this limitation head-on by calling upon supporters, rather than entrepreneurs, as informants.

Studies using the PSED-I typically characterize the networks around entrepreneurs as a simple count of the support ties (for example, Kotha and George, 2012), since this questionnaire does not provide information regarding how supporters relate with each other. Notably, this questionnaire includes information about the role each person plays in the entrepreneur's life, such as family member, friend, or business associate. This information has been used to analyze the relation between roles and rendered support efforts (Kim et al., 2013), to inform a measure of tie strength (Newbert et al., 2013), as well as to indicate embeddedness as inferred from the roles played by supporters (Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013). While these are each coherent uses of such information in their own right, it would seem to overextend a somewhat simple question in the questionnaire in the attempt to theorize phenomena that are delicate, complex, and quite diverse in their theoretical implications.

In the PSED-I, entrepreneurs can list up to four supporters within their firm and up to five outside of the firm, a feature that Kotha and George (2012) use to enhance their simple count of supporters to the entrepreneur. This caps the list of supporters at nine, rather than allowing the

entrepreneur to list all supporters that come to mind, an imposition that is absent in the social support literature reviewed here. Due to these features, the network data provided by the PSED has been described as “quite sparse”, yet still informative for “tentative inferences” (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011: 25).

Newbert et al. (2013) and Newbert and Tornikoski (2013) provide insightful critiques to the use of the PSED-I as they make suggestions for advancing the discussion of support to entrepreneurs. Newbert et al. (2013) draw attention to the fact that, although the PSED does provide longitudinal data that allowed them to track changes in relationship portfolio composition, a more fine-grained view is needed of the processes that shift the change from limited, homogeneous networks to heterogeneous ones. To this end, they state that fine-grained descriptions of the particularities of these relationships at the dyadic level is needed. They call for case-studies that reveal idiosyncratic and successful practices, rather than the descriptions of the usual, general, high-level descriptions of what most entrepreneurs do that quantitative, hypothesis-driven studies provide (Siggelkow, 2007). Newbert and Tornikoski (2013) repeats the call for qualitative studies, adding to this that lack of any information on the relationships among and around supporters means that we do not yet know how these structures enable and constrain support efforts (Chauvet & Chollet, 2010). Similarly, Rawhouser et al. (2017) specifically point out that there is still a need to understand the relational structures (that is, forms of embeddedness, cliquishness, characterization of peculiarities of relationships throughout different patterns of networks, etc.) that actually yield unique forms of support efforts. Clearly, two avenues need to be pursued to advance the discussion of support to entrepreneurs: qualitative, interpretivist analyses are necessary for delving into the experience that holds the effects of social support together, and knowledge of the supporters’ side in rendering support should be unpacked.

The Danish Alter Study of Entrepreneurship is an interesting move towards revealing the structure of relationships beyond the simple count of direct connections to the entrepreneur. It is a

dataset that focuses on supporters, rather than entrepreneurs, and is comprehensively described in Nielsen (2014). Here, respondents were randomly selected and asked whether they had provided advice and financial support to entrepreneurs, as well as if they were willing to provide such support. In addition, the questionnaire includes questions about supporters' own network, asking about the role of the people connected to the supporter, though no question is asked about whether these people have ties to each other or to the entrepreneur. From this, Nielsen (2019), was able to provide insight into the flows of support efforts across the network, where emotional support efforts to the supporter were associated with financial and advice support efforts to the entrepreneur, a mechanism she refers to as "passing on the good vibes" (see also Nielsen, 2017). While this dataset provides a unique view of the supporters' side of the story of social support to entrepreneurs, it does not delve deeply into the particular experiences supporters have in rendering support efforts, for which qualitative methods are needed (Cope, 2005a; Jack, 2010; Karataş-Özkan et al., 2014; Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013; Newbert et al., 2013).

2.1.1.2 The use of qualitative methods

Qualitative methods have indeed provided useful grounds for understanding support relationships. Hanlon and Saunders (2007) based their study on a set of fifty interviews with entrepreneurs, in which sociograms were used as a tool to communicate which supporters were more key to the entrepreneur than others. From these interviews, they coded for specific resources and relational features, thereby deriving measurements that could be analyzed in a more cartesian manner. Having these interviews to fall back on provided them with detailed information when the categories proved somewhat confusing, such as when they found that, in the roles associated with key supporters, the category "other" proved to be quite prominent. Consulting the original material, they could understand that these were indirect network contacts (that is, contacts of contacts) or formal business partners. So, while their study is quite numeric, inasmuch as the analysis and their

results are regarding counts and percentages of types of support efforts, distribution of roles, and amounts of relationships, their discussion is rich and high in credibility because, rather than theorize based on assumptions that underlie their measurements to infer what the numbers mean, they can rely on the accounts provided by the entrepreneurs themselves.

Ethnographic observation has also provided unique insight into how entrepreneurs interact with their surroundings and build relationships. In such approaches, the depth of particular words as they are grounded in unique situations can be informative, as in the following episode described by McKeever, Jack, and Anderson (2015: 58) regarding entrepreneurs in a depleted community. They mention a moment where, in the restaurant of one of their informants, someone ordered, “two steaks, one rare, one with peas”, to which the chef replied, from the kitchen, “is that Charlie O’Kane?” Such a seemingly banal exchange is informative to their theory because it shows the deep relationality that holds the network of embedded relationships together. This complements the statement from this same informant who owned the restaurant, who had suggested to them that the “secret” to their success was their sense of community that they fostered. Through their ethnographic observation, they could track how entrepreneurs’ involvement in a business network was intertwined with their involvement with the community in general as they performed multiple roles in diverse, but overlapping, settings. Using a similar method, Jack (2005) shadowed entrepreneurs to observe their use of strong and weak ties, finding several intricate patterns that spanned diverse roles and afforded constraints on the entrepreneurs’ efforts.

The level of detail obtained in ethnographic observation allows even for tongue-in-cheek subversion of widely established theory, such as Gaddefors and Anderson's (2017) discussion of the limits of entrepreneurs’ agency in relating with their surrounding social context (see Germain & Laifi, 2018). They point to the role of sheep in establishing key conditions for entrepreneurship efforts to emerge in a particular community, first using a widely established definition of entrepreneurship to provocatively state that the sheep were the entrepreneurs that initiated social

change, and then suggesting that, instead, conceptualization of entrepreneurship should be at the community level, rather than the individual level.

While these studies have been quite fruitful in exploring the relationship between entrepreneurs and their surrounding relationships, they have not unpacked the supporters' experiences and motivations for providing support. Given that social support literature was able to delve into these matters even by simply targeting the experience of being supported, it is somewhat surprising that, with the exception of Bianchi et al., (2018), stories of reciprocal exchanges of support have not emerged. I suspect that this has to do with the fact that entrepreneurship studies so often focus on the entrepreneur and their own efforts to solve their own challenges (Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007), rather than exploring entrepreneurship as a social phenomenon (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Spigel, 2017; Welter et al., 2017). Therefore, while social support studies could allow for the matter of rendered support efforts to emerge from the stories of received support efforts (for example, Sapin et al., 2016), entrepreneurship studies that wish to explore such experiences of rendering support efforts must specifically design the research project to seek out such phenomenon. In this sense, a view towards describing relational practices, where actors interact with each other in ways that position them in their community (Bouwen, 2010), instead of theorizing and modeling economical exchanges (Steyaert & van Looy, 2010), can provide insight into how actors in interaction cooperatively build the organizing routines that establish the emergence of firms, as is developed in chapters IV and V of this thesis.² This is vital if we are to build a processual view of how entrepreneurial networks unfold around and throughout their projects (Lamine et al., 2015).

Interviews have proven insightful when dealing with failure, granting a view of experiences of extreme challenges in the entrepreneurial process (Byrne & Shepherd, 2015; Cope, 2011;

² In line with the backdrop in this review pertaining to well-being, it is interesting to note that the opening chapter of Steyaert and van Looy (2010) consists of an autoethnography that describes relational practices in a community, providing one-of-a-kind care for people dealing with mental illness (Bouwen, 2010).

Shepherd, 2003, 2004; Shepherd & Cardon, 2009). While using a limited number of interviews—for example, Cope (2011) uses eight interviews and Byrne and Shepherd (2015) use eight from an available set of thirteen interviews—these studies aim for depth in their analysis of the material at hand, an effort that would be unwieldy if performed on a large scale (Cope, 2005a). Much in line with Newbert and Tornikoski's (2013) call for more idiosyncratic case studies that reveal what unique solutions have been pursued in the matter of support to entrepreneurs, such studies manage to delve into the intricacies of the experience of extremely harrowing situations faced by entrepreneurs. As such, it is not surprising that cognitive and emotional strategies come to the foreground in their theorizing, leaving the affective dimension of rising to meet these harrowing challenges as a secondary, yet still relevant, feature. Still, surveying these studies, it is clear that interviews are powerful for obtaining a view of the experience of being caught up in such situations. As will be explored in this thesis, such portrayals of the experience through phenomenological inquiry provides insight into both entrepreneurs' experiences of receiving support efforts, as well as supporters' experience in supporting entrepreneurs as they develop their own relationships.

While quantitative methods have been helpful in identifying the structures of relationships in a network associated with such specific outcomes as good ideas (Burt, 2004), endeavor survival (Uzzi, 1997), accrual of reputation for the product and the entrepreneur (Podolny, 2001), qualitative methods have been useful for exploring the underlying assumptions which guide such studies (Ibarra et al., 2005; Jack, 2010), such as the directive power of relationships (McKeever et al., 2015), the strain of participating in cliques (Krackhardt, 1999), the activation of strong and weak ties in obtaining support (Jack, 2005), the ways entrepreneurs embed themselves to achieve performance superior to the market (Uzzi, 1996), and the social micro-processes of integrating people in innovation processes (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Obstfeld, 2005), just to name a few. In these qualitative studies, the matter of the meanings articulated in these relationships can be

explored as underlying mechanisms that explain why certain network structures or tie strengths work the way they do (Chauvet & Chollet, 2010).

2.2 GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE PRESENT RESEARCH DESIGN

2.2.1 Reconstructing stories from interactions with informants

In this thesis, I present and discuss interviews and ethnographic observations of entrepreneurs and supporters that emphasize their experience in the support path. I build from the assumption that conversations have the dual function of enacting cognition regarding a network structure (Quinn & Dutton, 2005), while also establishing actors' position within a network structure that can be conceptualized and navigated (Tilly, 2005). Meaning happens as actors face challenging situations, trying to form accounts of what is happening and articulate their positions (Fuhse, 2009; White, 1995). Essentially, I seek a way to both pinpoint meanings in actors' life-world while, simultaneously, following how these meanings are articulated in conversation (Bamberg, 2011; Daher et al., 2017). The emphasis in each chapter, ultimately, rests on tracking the stories and narratives of social support to entrepreneurs, rather than simply crafting the discussion of mechanisms around quotes (Germain & Laifi, 2018).

In Figure 2.1, I present the research questions that guide the empirical chapter. These questions explore both structural and cultural relational mechanisms, in varying degrees. Chapter III mainly explores structural mechanisms, using fuzzy-set Qualitative Case Analysis (fsQCA) (Ragin, 2008) to perform cross-case analyses. These are then complemented with within-case analyses. Chapter IV, subsequently, balances meaning and structure, using Qualitative Structural Analysis (QSA) (Herz et al., 2014) to perform within-case analyses and building up to cross-case comparisons. These two chapters use opposite analytical strategies on the same data, obtaining quite different, but complementary, results (Chabaud & Germain, 2006). Finally, chapter V explores clashes of cultures that enable support through relational ethnography (Desmond, 2014).

Throughout these chapters, I use narrative analysis to disentangle the meaning of relationships to the support that they provide to the entrepreneur, and the meaning of the support provided to their efforts to establish relationships along the support path. This does not test the conditions where support might or might not arise, but provides means to thematically follow the support within the narratives describing the relationships in question. Narrative analysis provides a view towards the associations actors make through themes, metaphors, and associations around the matter at hand (Bearman & Stovel, 2000; Garud et al., 2014; Hjorth, 2007). By following these associations among key elements within an overarching message, or “plot”, the analyst can track how a particular key element (in our analysis, the support efforts towards an entrepreneur) plays out its role within and against the elements in the story (here, the direct and indirect relationships) (Germain & Laifi, 2018). Our focus is on capturing the entrepreneurs’ and supporters’ experience of being in a particular position within the support network (Jack, 2010) by unpacking the support path. In this sense, informants can be seen as knowledgeable regarding the life-world they present, and are reliable sources of insight (Schütz, 1970).

The interview is an explorative conversation with the purpose of narrating a situation as guided by the researcher. Here, we find ways the interviewees approach the network at hand (for example, framing, categorization, anchoring) (Deppermann, 2013; Wortham, 2000). Investigations lend themselves well to an interpretative approach towards the narratives which the interviewees articulated, which brings meanings to the foreground (Bernhard, 2018). Since investigations are limited to descriptions (van den Berg, 2008), they do not reveal how actors go about using conversation strategies to provoke changes (White, 2008).

Building from QSA (Herz et al., 2014), we present a method guided by generative questions. First, I identify a network query, that is, a research question about positioning in a network structure, as guided by the research design and which should be present in the interview protocol. For this reason, these studies are not exercises in purely inductive, grounded theory (Gioia, Corley,

& Hamilton, 2013). It is here that knowledge about the phenomenon of interest escapes the informant, simply because they are not operating in the realm of building upon an established body of knowledge. In this sense, it is the social scientist, and not the informant, who is a knowledgeable source of information as they reconstruct the story at hand to address the phenomenon of interest (Schütz, 1944; Schütz, 1970).

Second, all references to the issues pertaining to the network query are flagged and read in order to generate questions that will guide an interpretive approach (Bamberg, 2006; Deppermann, 2013; Georgakopoulou, 2006). These questions are subsequently used to interpret the narratives in the interview. These are key in tying together the interviews as a particular story (Fontdevila, 2010). New questions should be generated from the answers to the original set, and then used again to re-approach the interview. This process is repeated until the researcher has identified the meanings that can be associated to draw clarity to the situations that are developed as stories (Fontdevila, Opazo, & White, 2011; Fuhse, 2009).

This is fully employed in chapter IV, where we used QSA (Herz et al., 2014) to explore the experience of social support to entrepreneurs while embedded in a structure of relationships, and in chapter V, where I perform a relational ethnography (Desmond, 2014) to describe boundaries and challenges in a community undergoing an entrepreneurial process. We also use QSA in a preliminary manner in chapter III, where we could explore in these experiences the mechanisms governing the results, rather than simply inferring these mechanisms from the assumptions in our coding. All three empirical chapters culminate in descriptive storytelling as a research strategy (Crapanzano, 1986; Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Le, 2014).

2.2.2 Obtaining accounts from entrepreneurs and their supporters in Brazil (Chapters III and IV)

While we know a considerable amount about the benefits that entrepreneurs receive from their supporters, there is little understanding of how the supporters own network influences the

support rendered to the entrepreneur. In chapters III and IV, we suggest that insight into the process of entrepreneurs' access to support can be gained by looking into the features of relationships that make up the relational paths connecting supporters' contacts to the entrepreneur through their supporters. We call the supporter's contacts "third parties", and the relational path connecting the third party to the entrepreneur through one indirect tie and one direct tie a "support path". The present study investigates how the support received by an entrepreneur depends on the qualities of the entrepreneur's relationship to a supporter—a direct tie—in conjunction with the relationships the supporter has to a third party—an entrepreneur's indirect tie³. Here, we inquire into a matter of structural embeddedness, that is, the way in which actors throughout a network are connected amongst themselves, both directly and indirectly (Jones et al., 1997; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). However, our intuition is that this structural embeddedness of the supporter and entrepreneur among actors is embodied in relational practices that speak to the qualities of these dyadic relationships, that is, relational embeddedness.

The following two chapters were developed out of the same set of interviews. To avoid repetition, their research design and setting are described here. For the empirical work developed in chapters III and IV, we began exploring developmental support paths by interviewing entrepreneurs, who were contacted in São Paulo, Brazil in 2016. São Paulo has recently become the leading center for venture capitalism in Latin America and has been growing in prominence (Herrmann, Gauthier, Holtschke, Berman, & Marmer, 2015). As a developing economy, São Paulo is an ideal setting to observe the use of networks, since, as is characteristic of developing economies, relationships are relied on to overcome severe institutional shortcomings (Anderson & Obeng, 2017; Danis, De Clercq, & Petricevic, 2011; Turgo, 2016; Welter, Xheneti, & Smallbone,

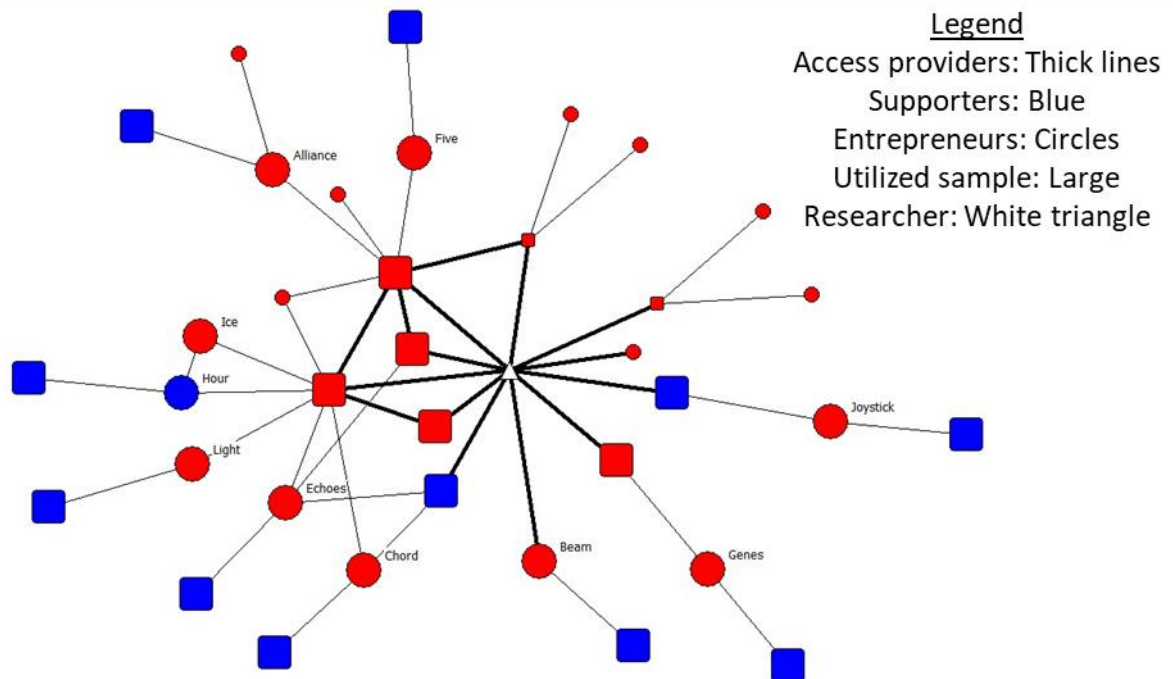
³ Although our main contribution is that we shift attention to the supporter and place them in the center, we follow the somewhat counter-intuitive terminology to describe the two ties along this path: direct tie and indirect tie. Obviously, the relationship between the supporter and the third party is a direct tie for the supporter. However, as exposed above, extant literature has studied the support relationship as the entrepreneur's direct tie, and has theorized the value of the indirect ties beyond the supporter. To extend this inquiry into the importance of the indirect tie in enabling and shaping the support rendered to the entrepreneur, we preserve this terminology.

2018). Such a research setting provides a clear view of relational phenomena which happen normally in any context, though perhaps less deliberately (Autio, Nambisan, Thomas, & Wright, 2018; Thompson, Purdy, & Ventresca, 2018). To further explore these dynamics, however, in chapter V I explore a very different entrepreneurial setting: a small community in a French countryside town.

Our research design was aimed at reaching developmental supporters, so we started with entrepreneurs' experience in receiving support, specifically asking about relationships with supporters, then interviewed the supporter chosen by the entrepreneur (Ketchen, Ireland, & Webb, 2014). Figure 2.1 below describes the sampled network. Because these relational dynamics are not expected to be unique to any particular form of entrepreneurship, my co-authors and I decided not to sample from any specific gender, industry, or (lack of) involvement in central organizations in the local ecosystem (Anderson et al., 2012; Lounsbury et al., 2019). Rather, we sought entrepreneurs from diverse positions, industries, and demographics, as can be seen in table 2.1 (Welter et al., 2017). One restriction was imposed on the sample: because the research question pertains to an interpersonal phenomenon, all businesses were early stage, no older than five years of age, to maintain the focus on entrepreneurs' personal ties, rather than the ties which leverage the reputation of their company (Hallen, 2008).

First, I reached out to centers that provide training to entrepreneurs, including a venture capitalist fund, an AACSB-accredited business school, a prestigious co-working space supported by a major bank, and an independent entrepreneurship training center. This provided me with access to elite entrepreneurs, as well as entrepreneurs aspiring to rise in the ecosystem. Some entrepreneurs were suggested by multiple access providers. In parallel, I sought out entrepreneurs in my own network, either directly or recommended by contacts in my own network, which had been developed throughout well over a decade of professional experience in São Paulo. This

Figure 2.1 – Sample network



provided additional entrepreneurs who are not directly connected to the elite entrepreneurship circle, and instead are simply engaging their own networks to build their startup outside of the elite entrepreneurship ecosystem. Basically, the bottom left side of the network in figure 2.1 contains entrepreneurs and supporters drawn from the elite ecosystem, while the top left side contains aspirants to this ecosystem. The right side of the network contains entrepreneurs that are unconnected to this elite ecosystem. These relationships that provided access are indicated with thick lines. In all, thirty-six entrepreneurs were directly contacted, and over one hundred received general invitations in classrooms and inclusion of the study on internal communication reports. Entrepreneurs that accepted to be interviewed are indicated with circles.

I interviewed eighteen entrepreneurs. In these interviews, entrepreneurs were asked to describe in depth their relationship with up to two supporters, and then to put me in touch with them so that they could be invited to an interview. I contacted thirty-four supporters (two for most entrepreneurs), of which twelve accepted to be interviewed. Often, although both supporters were contacted for an interview, only one accepted to be interviewed. Four of these supporters were connected to two entrepreneurs. The remaining eight supporters were connected to one

entrepreneur each, which means that in the total sample, ten entrepreneurs were paired with twelve supporters. Although eighteen entrepreneurs were interviewed, supporters to ten of these accepted to be interviewed. The remaining eight interviews that did not have supporter interviews were discarded for the purposes of this thesis, as they did not provide views of support paths. The retained sample is indicated through large nodes, and the discarded interviews are indicated with small nodes.

Note that in one case, Joystick, the supporter provided access to the entrepreneur. Although he provided access, he only became a supporter for the purpose of the study once the entrepreneur elected to describe their relationship in detail. After this interview with the entrepreneur, this acquaintance was contacted again and invited to an interview in the role of a supporter. Similarly, Hour was a startup where the entrepreneur was also elected as a supporter to his neighbor startup at the co-working space, Ice. He was first interviewed as an entrepreneur, and only at the end of this interview was he informed that his colleague at Ice had nominated him as a supporter. I then interviewed him again on a separate occasion regarding his role as supporter to Ice.

As Cope (2005, 2011) warned, in such an interpretivist inquiry a medium or large sample runs the risk of losing clarity and depth by being swamped with too many unrelated details. To preserve the depth of the analysis of commonplace, everyday experiences of the informants, the research should be done around a small sample of cases. Rather than seek frequency, the current analysis delves into the experience of the relational mechanisms surrounding support. In set-theoretic language, these accounts seek sufficient, but not necessary, conditions (Ragin, 2008). Interviews were typically one hour long, the exceptions being the interview with the entrepreneur in Genes⁴, which took three and a half hours, and the supporter in Echoes, which took thirty minutes. Interviews were conducted in person as permitted. For Joystick, one supporter was located in the United States. For other supporters, I had already returned to France by the time we were

⁴ All names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

able to schedule the interview. These interviews were conducted via Skype. Table 2.1 below lists the duration and means of communication for each interview. All 22 of these interviews were recorded.

Table 2.1 – Duration and means of communication for interviews

	Entrepreneur	In person or Skype?	Supporter	In person or Skype?
Alliance	1:33	In person	0:58	Skype
Beam	0:56	In person	0:52	In person
Chord	1:01	In person	0:49	In person
			0:49	In person
Echoes	0:42	In person	0:28	Skype
Five	0:57	In person	1:37	Skype
Genes	3:30	In person	1:00	Skype
Hour	0:46	In person	1:08	In person
Ice	0:50	In person	0:49	In person
Joystick	1:13	In person	0:56	In person
			0:52	Skype
Light	1:02	In person	1:27	Skype
Total recorded interview time, by role	11:32		10:25	
Total recorded interview time	21:57			

2.2.3 Interview Protocol (Chapters III and IV)

That relationships prefigure support is well documented in social network literature (for example, Dubini and Aldrich, 1991; van der Poel, 1993; Small and Sukhu, 2016). Therefore, we take a decidedly different approach than those used in the PSED-I and other studies of support to entrepreneurs reviewed above. Rather than ask entrepreneurs who gives resources, we inquire about both entrepreneurs' and supporters' experience in relationships and, from there, seek to understand the support. This allows us to capture the relational underpinnings that shape the unique support that entrepreneurs receive and that, ultimately, inspires the projects they develop.

Table 2.2 – Overview of support paths

Support path			
Startup Pseudonym	Industry	Relation of Supporter to entrepreneur	Relation of third party to supporter
Alliance	Tourism	Friend	Former hierarchical superior, current friend
			Friend
Beam	Translation services	Brother	Mother
			Wife
Chord-A	HR services	Representative of major consulting firm allocated in co-working space	Current hierarchical superior
			CEO of neighbor startup in co-working space
Chord-B		Employee of neighbor startup at co-working space	Current hierarchical superior
			Mentor, former vocational-school teacher
Echoes	Education	Coordinator of co-working space and longtime advisor	Advisor
Five	Education	Mother	Agent
			Housemate, ex-husband, business partner
Genes	Retail / Education	Friend	Friend
			Friend
Hour	Business intelligence	Friend and CEO of neighbor startup in co-working space	Wife
			Coach
Ice	Education	Friend and CEO of neighbor startup in co-working space	Formal Mentor
			Friend and CEO of neighbor startup in co-working space
Joystick-A	Information systems	Friend (Former hierarchical superior in beginning of entrepreneur's career)	Friend and co-worker
			Former student
Joystick-B		Friend	Friend
			Friend
Light	Business intelligence	Friend and former colleague at previous desk job	Friend

In the interview, we invited the entrepreneur to describe their business. We understand that our role as interviewers is to participate in the intersubjective construction of the narrative (Bernhard, 2016b) by guiding it through the network structures which interest us (Bernhard, 2018). The assumption that we explore about the network structure and assumption that we explore is that the support received by the entrepreneur from the supporter is shaped by the supporter's direct relationship with the entrepreneur in conjunction with their relationship with the third party. We do not set out to test this claim, but rather investigate the many ways this mechanism can occur. In these interviews, we asked entrepreneurs to describe their business, especially in regard to their challenges and achievements. This stage of the interview served for priming, providing grounds upon which the entrepreneurs would position their stories of receiving support.

Then the entrepreneur was asked with whom they talked about the matters they described, generating a list of supporters. entrepreneurs with whom they spoke about these issues, which elicited a list of names, often spontaneously tagged with short comments about their relationships with these people. Once the entrepreneur felt the list was saturated, they were invited to choose one supporter from the list about whom we would have a more in-depth conversation, essentially the same question used by Hanlon and Saunders (2007). The entrepreneur's choice here is assumed to be the one that best fits the narrative of support the entrepreneur had been forming up to this point of the interview, since until this moment they had been talking about managing their business (Roulston, 2010; White, Fuhse, Thiemann, & Buchholz, 2007). Therefore, we left this question without further details, this way allowing them to choose the relationship that would continue developing the narrative they were exploring until that point. We then asked them about their relationship, following the dimensions of tie strength as described by Granovetter (1973), that is, closeness (affect), frequency, type of relationship, and reciprocity, as well as the story of how they met or, if the supporter had known the entrepreneur for a considerable amount of time before they were professionals (for example, childhood friends or family), how the supporter had gotten to

know them as an entrepreneur. Particular attention was given to exploring what the supporter had done for the entrepreneur. With two exceptions, time during the interview allowed for further exploration of a second relationship following the exact same protocol. Here, we capture the entrepreneur's experience in the direct relationship with the supporter. Entrepreneurs were sent an additional set of questions where they indicated who, in their list of supporters, interacted with whom recently, with whom they talked about the main issues they listed, and who provided what type of support, where advice was one possible form of support they could signal here. If time permitted, this sequence was repeated, asking the entrepreneur to choose another relationship to describe.⁵

We reached out to the supporters whose relationships were described in detail. Supporters were asked about their impressions of the entrepreneur's business, including the challenges they knew the entrepreneur was facing, then asked to describe their relationship with the entrepreneur. We discussed challenges in entrepreneurship guided by their description of the entrepreneur's project, and kept a list of these challenges, which was subsequently discussed with the supporter as key features of entrepreneurship as they saw it. This contributed to our understanding of the direct developmental support relationship.

After this, we approached the supporters whom the entrepreneurs had described. These interviews followed a similar protocol as the interviews with entrepreneurs. First, we asked them to describe the entrepreneur's business. Then we asked them to describe their relationship with the entrepreneur, following the same framework regarding tie strength. When this was finished, we then returned to their description of the entrepreneur's business, listing back to them the themes about which they had told us.

⁵ We sent a follow-up questionnaire to the entrepreneur, asking them about the list of people in terms of a) who knows whom, b) with whom the entrepreneur talks about each of the challenges and achievements they listed, and c) what type of support they received. Mentioned here in the interest of transparency, we did not use this information in the analysis, since it was developed from our own assumptions, and did not reflect the narrative of in the interview.

At this point, they could revise, adjust, or add to the description of the entrepreneurs' situation, as they understood it. By interacting with this content, it provided space to ground the following section of the interview: we then asked them with whom they talked about "this kind of entrepreneurship", that is, entrepreneurship that they felt had the same kinds of themes as those involved with the entrepreneur. They listed these people, often with spontaneous pieces of information about these relationships. This list provided the indirect relationships with third parties, connected to the entrepreneur through the supporter. Once this list of third parties was saturated, we invited supporters to choose one or two of these people listed to talk about in further depth.

Once this list was signaled by the supporter to be saturated, we asked them to choose one of these people to describe in detail. Again, the chosen relationships are assumed to be particularly influential in how the supporter provides support, since they were part of the narrative which the supporter developed throughout the interview. Similar to the interview with the entrepreneur and in the first section of the interview with the supporter, we asked them to describe this selected relationship in regard to their closeness, frequency of interaction, and type of relationship, adding on a question regarding what they talk about. When time permitted, this sequence was repeated, asking them to choose and describe another relationship. With this interview protocol, we were able to get the supporters' experience in the indirect and direct relationships. This provided a full view of twenty-two support paths that shape the support that is rendered. The detailed descriptions of the supporter's experience in the relationships allows us to track the influence of each indirect relationship to the support that was rendered. Therefore, each support path is treated as a case. These twenty-two support paths are summarized in Table 2.2.

2.2.4 Analysis strategy (Chapters III and IV)

During the sampling period, a sense of having "heard it all" was achieved (Morse, 1995), as interviews with entrepreneurs tended to circle back to similar descriptions, in a general sense. This

was not a theoretically guided intuition, but simply recognition that the above interview protocol had reached its limits. For example, the above protocol was most of the time not conducive to exploring ties where casual conversations could have been supportive, and had a tendency to elicit non-financial support relationships, since it revolved around “with whom do you talk about these challenging situations?” (Agneessens et al., 2006). Upon initiating analysis, relational mechanisms were sought out that could conceivably be compared across all cases. We first employed fsQCA (Ragin, 2008) in this exploration, which rendered a high-level indication that homophily was a key factor in achieving meaningful support, and that purposefully engaging with each other along the support path to overcome challenges played a key role in handling those relational paths where homophily was not apparent. These results are reported elsewhere. Throughout this exploration, multiplexity (Kuwabara, Luo, & Sheldon, 2010) seemed to be relevant, as informants constantly navigated the limits of the several types of relationships they had with the people they described. However, no clarification of the role of multiplexity or uniplexity could be found at this stage, as this category did not capture the nuances of tie governance that different situations elicited (Mische & White, 1998).

For this reason, deeper interpretive methods were sought out, and QSA (Herz et al., 2014) proved to be the most informative method, as it allowed us to start with a clear network structure as point of inquiry, and then explore this structure within informants’ descriptions of their experience within this structure. While the narratives were approached without specific concepts of network theory in mind, we quickly found that traditional features of the relationships were articulated in these narratives, revealing how these actors navigated these basic notions. Therefore, after exploring the twenty-two relational paths with within-case studies, we were satisfied that we could, with the sample at hand, explore matters of homophily, multiplexity, and closure. This was because combinations of descriptions of heterophily/homophily, multiplexity/uniplexity, and closure/brokerage were present in all described support paths, and could be captured in their

relational, cognitive, and structural dimensions of social life as experienced in rendering and receiving support. While we are satisfied that the variation on these topics has been achieved, our objective is not to descriptively exhaust the mechanisms to be found throughout combinations, but rather to use these combinations as a starting point to open up various relational mechanisms through which support emerges (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

As the analyses in chapters III and IV unfolded, further questions regarding the cultural context and the challenges in upholding relationships in a network emerged. These were serendipitously found to be answered by an ethnographic exercise I had done four months prior to the data collection described above, between October 12th and December 3rd, 2015 (see Appendix C). However, the design of that particular research project are quite intimately connected to the theory development, contribution, and political agenda of that particular paper, and so are left for further detailed description in chapter V. Figure 2.2 below summarizes the research questions and methods employed in the empirical chapters, as well as how they relate to the overall research agenda of this thesis. Table 2.3 below indicates the analytical methods and data used in each chapter.

Table 2.3 – Empirical data and methods of analysis

	Data	Method	Type of analysis
Chapter III	22 interviews of entrepreneurs and supporters in São Paulo, Brazil	fsQCA	Configurational set-theoretic
Chapter IV		QSA	Narrative
Chapter V	Observations and interviews in a small French town	Relational Ethnography	Ethnographic

The present chapter has explored the shortcomings of extant studies of support to entrepreneurs, which have mostly been centered around entrepreneurs and their needs, rather than the social processes around the support efforts. This has highlighted the need for what has only recently been fully expressed as an urgent turn towards apprehending culture (Lounsbury et al., 2019; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019) and experiences (Karataş-Özkan et al., 2014) in the unfolding process of entrepreneurship that plays out among a network of actors (Garud et al., 2018).

Figure 2.2 – Structure of empirical chapters

Why do supporters willingly support entrepreneurs and their projects?

Extant literature:

Because the network is optimally configured

(e.g., Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013; Nielsen, 2018; Rawhauser et al., 2017,

Chapter 3: How do support paths enable the transfer of knowledge to entrepreneurs?

Method: fsQCA (Ragin, 2008)

Present investigations:
What are the relational mechanisms that enable support to entrepreneurs?

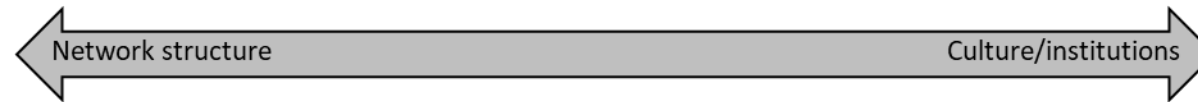
Chapter 5: how do actors who are caught up in entrepreneurial action, either acting as entrepreneurs or supporters to entrepreneurs' endeavors, operate culture to achieve and embrace their situated position in a given network?
Method: Relational ethnography (Desmond, 2014)

Chapter 4: how do support paths around supporters shape supportive relational practices to entrepreneurs?
Method: QSA (Herz et al, 2014)

Extant literature:

Because culture is skillfully operated to communicate legitimacy

(e.g., Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Lounsbury et al., 2019; O'Neil & Ucbasaran, 2016; Überbacher, 2014; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002)



Chapter 3

Advising Peers: Relational Conditions for Knowledge Flows to Entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that relationships are sources of usable knowledge for entrepreneurs, we inquire about configurations of support relationships that are associated with advice to entrepreneurs. We observe flows of knowledge along “support paths”, which are combinations of direct and indirect relationships, connecting entrepreneurs to supporters and connecting supporters to third parties. We inquire, how do support paths enable entrepreneurs’ supporters to transfer knowledge? Through fsQCA, we find two equifinal configurations of support paths: 1) support paths comprised of direct and indirect *peer* relationships (as opposed to mentor relationships) or 2) closed support paths, where the entrepreneur also interacts with the same third person. Through subsequent content analysis of the interviews, we find that these configurations are sustained by supporters’ efforts to be advisor and relationship articulator in the wider support network.

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Knowledge serves as a “critical intangible resource” for entrepreneurs (Alvarez & Busenitz, 2007: 760), and its acquisition is particularly important for entrepreneurs given their lack of resources in general (Renzulli, Aldrich, & Moody, 2000). In addition, knowledge is critical to the identification and exploitation of opportunities upon which to establish viable businesses (Ozgen & Baron, 2007; Politis, 2005). Entrepreneurs acquire knowledge when they ask their supporters for advice, establishing a flow of usable knowledge from their network (Chatterji, Delecourt, Hasan, & Koning, 2019; Cross et al., 2001; Dobrow, Chandler, Murphy, & Kram, 2012). Supporters are people who “willingly provide an entrepreneur with access to a valued resource” (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007: 607). Broadly speaking, a person becomes a supporter by providing a particular resource when the entrepreneur presents the need for it. Specifically, relationships with supporters enable knowledge flows to entrepreneurs when supporters respond to entrepreneurs’ needs for advice.

Knowledge, however, is not a simple resource that flows from supports to entrepreneurs (Borgatti, 2005; Kraaijenbrink, Spender, & Groen, 2010). Rather, the giving of usable knowledge requires special effort by the supporter to translate their own knowledge into a new form that applies to the entrepreneur’s unique challenges (Carlile, 2004; St-Jean & Audet, 2009). From an entrepreneurs perspective, obtaining usable knowledge requires them to request advice from those supporters who have access to relevant knowledge and are able to translate it to entrepreneurs’

distinct unclear, unsettling situations (Cross et al., 2001; Lomi, Lusher, Pattison, & Robins, 2013). The relationship between an entrepreneur and supporter, however, does not exist in isolation. Rather, the conditions for knowledge flow lie beyond a dyadic relationship an entrepreneur has with a particular supporter. Knowledge flow from supporters to entrepreneurs is conditioned upon how the supporter's own relationships allow him/her access to other actors who are beyond the entrepreneur's reach, i.e., entrepreneurs' indirect ties (Dubini & Aldrich, 1991). Studies of support to entrepreneurs, however, have focused on features of entrepreneurs' direct relationships, taking for granted the potential benefits of the indirect relationships (e.g. Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998; Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Jack, 2005; Kotha & George, 2012; Lounsbury, Gehman, & Glynn, 2019; Newbert & Tornikoski, 2012, 2013; Newbert et al., 2013).

Restricting our view to only an entrepreneur's own direct relationships fails to explore crucial mechanisms that shape whether an entrepreneur's supporters will advise them, and by doing so transfer usable knowledge from the wider network to the entrepreneur (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Welter, Baker, Audretsch, & Gartner, 2017). There are both a relevant direct relationships with supporters (resource providers), as well as relevant indirect relationships between the supporter and other people. We refer to the people in these indirect relationships as "third parties". Their importance in generating support is less obvious to the entrepreneur, even if entrepreneurs interact directly with them, because third parties assist the supporter in generating and deploying such resources as usable knowledge (Nielsen, 2019). Hence, the purpose of our study is to investigate conditions around direct relationships to supporters and indirect relationships to third parties under which supporters transfer knowledge to entrepreneurs.

We propose to better understand *support paths*, which serve as a relational mechanism that enables supporters to advise entrepreneurs. We define a support path as the combined connection of an entrepreneur to a supporter and the supporter to a third party (Dubini & Aldrich, 1991; Patel & Terjesen, 2011). As such, a support path spans beyond the direct relationship of a supporter to

an entrepreneur. Therefore, in this paper we ask, how do support paths enable supporters to transfer usable knowledge to entrepreneurs?

Through a qualitative field study in São Paulo, Brazil, we sought to bring a better understanding of our research question through a two-step analysis. To begin, we performed a systematic cross-case comparison through fuzzy-set Qualitative Case Analysis (fsQCA) (Douglas et al., 2020; Schneider & Wagemann, 2008) to identify sufficient conditions for supporters to transfer knowledge to entrepreneurs. At this stage, we find two equifinal solutions for support paths to enable flows of knowledge to entrepreneurs. The first solution is that both the supporter and the third party are similar to the entrepreneur in professional experience, regardless whether the entrepreneur and third party interact with each other. The other solution is that the entrepreneur and the third party interact with each other, regardless of whether the supporter has greater professional experience than the entrepreneur. Subsequently, consistent with fsQCA methodology (Schneider & Rohlfing, 2013), we proceeded with within-case analyses to understand why these two conditions were conducive to knowledge flows. We find that supporters are active in establishing support paths in order to take up a role as articulators of support relationships in the wider support network.

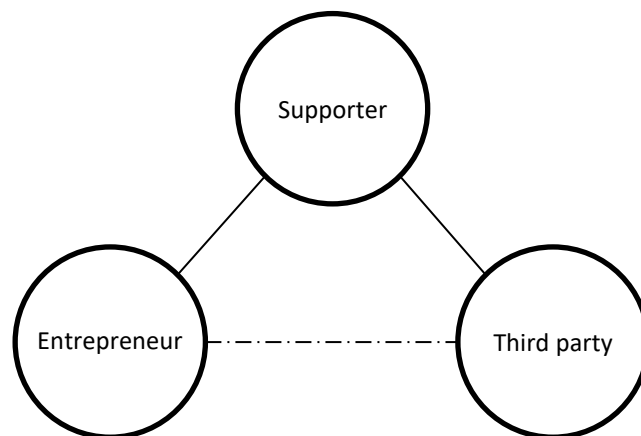
3.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Entrepreneurs turn to people in their own circles of relationships to obtain support (Goswami et al., 2018; Newbert et al., 2013). Brüderl and Preisendörfer (1998) found indications that entrepreneurs compensate for their own lack of knowledge and skill by turning to their own networks, triggering studies into the mechanisms in entrepreneurs' networks that allow them to access support (Renzulli et al., 2000). For example, Hanlon and Saunders (2007) found that entrepreneurs attribute very high importance to advice and emotional support from their supporters.

Relationships among an entrepreneurs' supporters have been shown to play a role in enabling support (Newbert and Tornikoski, 2013; Newbert et al., 2013). Similarly, Burt (2019) showed that

there are configurations of relationships among supporters directly connected to entrepreneurs that are appropriate for different stages of entrepreneurs' ventures. However, these studies were centered solely on those supporters who had a direct relationship to entrepreneurs, failing to capture the effect relationships that supporters have that are not directly connected to the entrepreneur. Other studies have looked much beyond these relationships around the entrepreneur and theorized about the full ecosystem, recognizing that context matters in shaping possibilities for ventures (for example, Anglin, McKenny, & Short, 2018; Baù, Chirico, Pittino, Backman, & Klaesson, 2019; Jacobides, Cennamo, & Gawer, 2018; Spiegel, 2017). These studies, however, assume fluid channels for knowledge flow, failing to account for relational mechanisms that enable such flows. We suggest observing an intermediary structure that can elucidate the relational mechanisms through which these knowledge flows take place. We suggest that the joint effect of direct and indirect relationships in the form of support paths may have a critical role to play in the flow of knowledge to entrepreneurs.

Figure 3.1 – The support path



Note that a relationship between the entrepreneur and the third party is possible, but not mandatory.

Simply put, a relational path spans beyond the direct support relationship, by means of an indirect relationship, from the entrepreneur to third parties, as portrayed in Figure 3.1. They are comprised of relationships that have a distinct place in their experience of supporting and being supported (Garud et al., 2014; Small, 2017). These paths are inter-subjectively constituted between entrepreneurs and their supporters (Gould & Fernandez, 1989). Therefore, supporters' efforts to

transfer knowledge are likely to stem from conjunctions of the relationship between the supporter and the third party *and* the relationship between the supporter and the entrepreneur.

3.1.1 Advice as a relationally embedded form of support

Knowledge is a vital resource for entrepreneurs to create and maintain their operations (Aldrich, 2000; Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001). The transfer of knowledge can give the person who receives it clarity on a situation that is unclear, perhaps even unsettling (Belhoste, Bocquet, Favre-Bonté, & Bally, 2019; Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010; Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Spender & Scherer, 2007). Interactions among individuals elicit insights that are relevant to situations the actors are deliberating together (Jack & Anderson, 2002). Knowledge generated in one situation is adapted to become applicable to another situation, meeting the needs of the individual who receives the advice (Carlile, 2004; St-Jean & Audet, 2009). It strengthens communication between actors as they negotiate framings and align their understandings of these situations (Ozgen & Baron, 2007; Thompson et al., 2018) which, in turn, facilitates future interactions (Autio et al., 2018; Smith, Moghaddam, & Lanivich, 2019).

Formally, we refer to such knowledge flows as Advising, which is *the transfer of usable knowledge by an individual at the request of another individual* (see Chatterji et al., 2019). Advising is an inherently relational construct because it involves one individual acknowledging the needs of another individual by responding with an action. It is usable for entrepreneurs because it provides solutions to problems, problem reformulation, knowledge of where to find knowledge, validation of the recipient's actions, and legitimation through association with a particular influential person (Cross et al., 2001; see also Dobrow et al., 2012; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005). Because more intense interaction is necessary for advising, actors often rely on their own personal connections (Burns, Barney, Angus, & Herrick, 2016; Cross et al., 2001). This can constrain advising relationships to a small group of actors closest to those in need of advice (Gedajlovic,

Honig, Moore, Payne, & Wright, 2013; Wood & McKinley, 2010). Research suggests that obtaining and rendering advice can be intense (Anderson & Jack, 2002; Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008; Ruef, Aldrich, & Carter, 2003), especially when an individual seeks to attain more context-specific knowledge (Cross et al., 2001).

3.1.2 Indirect relationships to third parties

Extant entrepreneurship literature has touched upon the idea that usable knowledge is generated in the relationship between supporters and third parties. Vissa and Chacar (2009) show that benefits obtained from diversity among supporters can be enhanced when the entrepreneur relates to those supporters whose own relationships extend beyond the network of relationships around the entrepreneur (see also Jack, 2005). Studying accelerators as connectors between entrepreneurs and the wider ecosystem, Goswami et al. (2018) emphasize that this connection is operationalized through chains of relationships among individuals. When Newbert and Tornikoski (2013) and Patel and Terjesen (2011) discuss how the entrepreneur can strategically bring supporters together to enhance the support received, they imply that supporters' relationships to each other, apart from the entrepreneur, has some implication to the way they support.

All these studies remain focused on entrepreneurs' reports of the support relationships, taking for granted the supporter's own experience within the network. Knowledge flow from one context to another is far from a trivial matter (Carlile, 2004). We understand, therefore, that supporters' experiences with both entrepreneurs and third parties matter a great deal. Although we know that relationships with third parties matter, extant literature does not explore how a supporters' own relationships with the entrepreneur (direct relationship) and with a third party (indirect relationship) establish knowledge flows to entrepreneurs through advice.

3.1.3 Sources of Useable Knowledge

In our search for relational mechanisms that enable flows of useable knowledge, we consider two established sources of knowledge: whether supporters' and third parties' have greater professional experience and whether the support path is an open or closed triad.

First, we start with an assumption that people with greater professional experience would have relevant knowledge to offer (Cotton, Shen, & Livne-Tarandach, 2011; Dobrow Riza & Higgins, 2018; St-Jean & Audet, 2012; Zhang, 2011). The intuition here is that entrepreneurs and supporters will receive the knowledge they need from support paths that involve supporters and third parties that are more experienced (e.g. Ahsan, Zheng, DeNoble, & Musteen, 2018; Goswami et al., 2018; St-Jean & Audet, 2012; St-Jean & Mathieu, 2015). However, studies have also shown that supporters who are at similar stages in their careers are also sources of advice because of their intimate understanding of the advisee's challenges (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Kuhn & Galloway, 2015; Parker et al., 2015) Paired with the above assumption that superior professional experience would be a source of useable knowledge, we suspect that such peer supporters gain knowledge from more experienced third parties. Therefore, we observe whether supporters have greater professional experience than entrepreneurs and whether third parties have greater professional experience than supporters.

Second, when the entrepreneur and third party interact with each other, the support path becomes a closed triad. Both open and closed triads have claims to enabling flows of useable knowledge, as well as support in general. On the one hand, novel knowledge can stem from supporters that access third parties who are unconnected to entrepreneurs, in a phenomenon well known as "brokerage" (Burt, 2004; Dubini & Aldrich, 1991; Granovetter, 1973; Podolny, 2001). On the other hand, closed triads can facilitate access to knowledge and enhance supporters' understanding of entrepreneurs' needs for advice (Grosser et al., 2019; Krackhardt, 1999; Obstfeld, 2005). It has been shown that closed support networks can enhance support relationships (Burt, 2019; Dobrow Riza & Higgins, 2018; Newbert et al., 2013).

In a nutshell, our framework is as follows. We observe how knowledge flows are associated with open and closed support paths, paired up with compared greater or similar professional experience among entrepreneurs, supporters, and third parties. Since each of these conditions has a plausible claim to enabling knowledge flows, a configurational approach is in order, where the joint effect of these conditions can be compared across cases. Recently, entrepreneurship studies have embraced the configurational approach towards outcomes of interest, finding that, in the words of (Linder, Lechner, & Pelzel, 2020: 909), “many roads lead to Rome”. Indeed, finding associations of particular outcomes with diverse configurations allows space for equifinality, that is, finding that there are different sufficient solutions that achieve the same outcome (Fiss, 2011). The following section describes how we used fsQCA around this framework to find sufficient relational conditions for knowledge flow along support paths.

3.2 METHODS

3.2.1 Methodological approach

Our study seeks to understand how support paths enable supporters to transfer usable knowledge to entrepreneurs. For this study we required a view of the experience of supporting and being supported (Small, 2017). In these accounts, interviewees highlight particular people who were protagonists in generating resources and rendering them to the entrepreneur. We used phenomenological interviews, rather than questionnaires, to give us data that had sufficient depth to understand the mechanisms that underlie support paths (Cope, 2005b).

We then compared these pairs of interviews with entrepreneurs and supporters to find sufficient conditions for support paths to enable knowledge flows. To do this, we coded these in terms of supporter and third party professional experience as “mentor/peer relationships”, and then in terms of entrepreneur’s interactions with third parties (closed triads). This theory-driven process is described below, as per fsQCA methodology (Kraus, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Schüssler, 2018).

3.2.2 Research context and sample

We began exploring support paths by interviewing entrepreneurs. We chose to gather data through interviews as a comprehensive understanding of support paths could not be obtained through questionnaires because the distinct relationships that comprise support paths are deeply connected to the experience of supporting and being supported (Small, 2017).

Our starting point was entrepreneurs' experience of support. In our interviews with entrepreneurs we explored their relationships with supporters, then we interviewed the supporter chosen by the entrepreneur (Ketchen et al., 2014). Only one restriction was imposed on the sample of entrepreneurs: all businesses were no older than five years of age, in order to keep the focus on entrepreneurs' personal relationships, rather than those which leverage the reputation of their company (Hallen, 2008). Entrepreneurs were sought out from diverse types of businesses because there is no theoretical reason for the interpersonal dynamics we are interested in understanding to be restricted to any specific type of business (Welter et al., 2017).

In total, the sample is comprised of 22 interviews, of which 10 were with entrepreneurs and 12 with supporters.⁶ Interviews were typically one hour long, the exceptions being one interview that extended to three and a half hours and one that took thirty minutes. All interviews were recorded. Our sample size aims for deep exploration of actors' experiences within these support paths, which we achieve in the within-case portion of this study, following phenomenological investigation (Cope, 2005b). This was necessary because the relationships along the support path are intimately related to the overarching narrative of supporting and being supported (Garud et al., 2014; Small, 2017). This requires analysis of fewer, but richer cases, as can be seen in Byrne and Shepherd (2015) and Cope (2011).

⁶ Interviews with eight entrepreneurs were discarded because their supporters were unwilling to grant an interview.

3.2.3 Data collection

Our data collection started by exploring entrepreneurs' experience of support. In our interviews with entrepreneurs we explored their relationships with supporters, then we interviewed the supporter chosen by the entrepreneur (Ketchen et al., 2014). These interviews were semi-structured, inviting informants to describe their experiences in supporting and being supported. After exploring the entrepreneur's project and challenges, we asked them to generate a list of people with whom they talked about these issues. Once the entrepreneur felt the list was saturated, they were invited to choose one supporter from the list about whom we had a more in-depth conversation (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007). The entrepreneur's choice here is assumed to be the one that continues the story of support the entrepreneur had been forming up to this point of the interview, since until this moment they had been talking about managing their business (Roulston, 2010; White et al., 2007). Instead of requesting advising relationships specifically, this question rendered descriptions of direct relationships with supporters, thereby allowing comparison in terms of the advice they did or did not receive. The rest of the interview explored what the supporter had done for the entrepreneur and the features of the relationship, following Granovetter's (1973) characterization of relationships in terms of reciprocity, intensity, closeness, and frequency. We then repeated the same process to obtain information about a second supporter. After the interview, we sent them a questionnaire regarding the full list of people with whom they discuss their business issues. Here, they indicated which issue they talked about with whom and what sort of support they received from which person. At this stage, 18 entrepreneurs were interviewed, describing relationships with 34 supporters.

We invited these supporters for interviews, of which 12 accepted to be interviewed. Interviews with supporters followed a similar semi-structured protocol. We started interviews by asking them about the entrepreneur's project and what they had done for the entrepreneur, as well as features of their relationship. We then generated a list of people with whom they talked about entrepreneurship matters. From this list, they were invited to choose one person, whose relationship

they described in a similar manner to the interview with the entrepreneur, in terms of reciprocity, intimacy, closeness, and frequency. Again, as in the interview with the entrepreneur, the chosen relationships are assumed to be particularly influential in how the supporter provides support, since they were part of the story which the supporter developed throughout the interview. This rendered a view of the indirect relationship with a third party. When time permitted, this final step was repeated to provide a description of another third party.

With this interview protocol, we were able to get the supporters' experience of the relationships to third parties and the direct relationship with the entrepreneur, thereby allowing us to understand how knowledge was generated and transferred through the support path as a result of the entrepreneurs' needs for advice.

3.2.4 Using fsQCA for the cross-case analysis

Our first step was to find sufficient relational conditions for knowledge flows in support paths, which we did in a cross-case comparative analysis. To this end, we employed fsQCA (Douglas et al., 2020; Duşa, 2019; Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). At its core, fsQCA is set theoretic (Schneider & Wagemann, 2008). Cases are coded according to their membership in conditions (Duşa, 2019) which is different from the widely used inductive methods of coding often associated with the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013). In fsQCA coding is deductive, working from clearly established theoretical categories, and calibrated so that the cases at hand best reflect the characterization in extant literature (Kraus et al., 2018). Full membership is coded as "1.0" and non-membership is "0.0" (Marx, 2010). Fuzzy-set membership has been introduced to capture the complexity of coding real-world cases into the crisp simplicity of case-membership, where values between "0.0" and "1.0" indicate imperfect, or "fuzzy", membership (Ragin, 2008). Recent literature has been developed to describe the use of fsQCA in business and entrepreneurship studies. Douglas et al. (2020) provides a general description of the method for entrepreneurship scholarship, Roig-Tierno, Huarng, and Ribeiro-Soriano (2016) present the importance of fuzzy-set

for coding entrepreneurship phenomena. Kimmitt et al. (2019) provide a clear and succinct description of the process of calibration and the matter of consistency in their appendix. Standards of practice around the method are presented in Schneider & Wagemann (2010).

FsQCA has proven to be useful in entrepreneurship studies to find complex combinations of conditions related to outcomes. Both Lisboa, Skarmeas, and Saridakis' (2016) and Mckenny, Short, Ketchen, Payne, & Moss' (2018) associate entrepreneurship performance outcomes such as stages of product innovation and profitability discoveries to combinations of entrepreneurial orientations. Similarly, Linder, Lechner, and Pelzel (2020) discuss firm performance according to configurations of human, social, and financial capitals to firm survival and failure. Kovács (2017) maps out of combinations of distinct personal values into entrepreneurial profiles, showing two profitable, yet distinct, value systems. At a macro level, Coduras, Clemente and Ruiz (2016) use fsQCA with the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor database to reinterpret associations of high levels of national innovation with certain combinations of social factors, and Kimmitt, Muñoz, and Newbery (2019) looked for associations of rural poverty amelioration and combinations of personal and social conversion factors. Observing relational phenomena through fsQCA, Muñoz and Dimov (2015) find combinations of factors around business- and social-support and the emergence of social enterprise.

The above studies do not test the distinct effects of particular variables. Instead, they find associations of particular outcomes with combinations of conditions. This allows space for equifinality, that is, finding that there are different solutions (that is, combinations of conditions) that achieve the same outcome. For example, Jenson, Leith, Doyle, West, and Miles (2016), find that two seemingly opposing theories of innovation processes are equifinal and different combinations of entrepreneurial conditions result in the same outcome.

Our study seeks to understand the joint effect of direct and indirect relationships on the flow of usable knowledge to entrepreneurs. FsQCA is useful for comparing support paths—that is, the relationships between the entrepreneur and the supporter and the relationship between the supporter

and the third party—because it can capture these joint effects (Fischer, 2011). Each relationship in the support path is taken as a condition. Following fsQCA terminology, each support path is a case. We first use fsQCA 3.0 (Ragin & Davey, 2016) to organize the cases to find what combinations of indirect and direct relationships around a supporter are sufficient to explain the support paths that result in advice.

3.2.4.1 Preliminary exploratory steps

The first step in our analysis was to perform a systematic cross-case comparison to identify sufficient conditions for advising to occur. The second step was to delve within the cases to understand why these conditions were conducive to advising.

Several techniques are available for cross-case analyses (Eisenhardt, 1989; Woodside, 2017; Yin, 2004). For the first step, fsQCA proved to be a useful tool to this end (Douglas et al., 2020; Duşa, 2019; Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Following fsQCA terminology, each support path is a case. We first use fsQCA 3.0 (Ragin & Davey, 2016) to organize the cases to find what combinations of indirect and direct relationships around a supporter are sufficient to explain the advising support paths. To perform the analysis, cases are scored to indicate the membership of a case in a condition according to the theoretical expectations. In QCA, membership is placed as a value of either “1,0” (membership) or “0,0” (non-membership) (Marx, 2010). The analysis is conducted to find the combinations of conditions that are sufficient for the occurrence of the outcome condition (Breiger, 2009). Ragin, (2008) proposed fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) to enhance QCA analysis (see also Schneider and Wagemann, 2010), which allows membership scores ranging between “0,0” and “1,0”, where “0,5” is considered the point of maximum ambiguity regarding membership in a condition. The “fuzzy set” analysis attributes penalties to the consistency of solutions by showing when a case does not have complete membership in the solution that is observed to be sufficient for the outcome, even though it might resemble the solution in some respects. This method is theory-driven, inasmuch as codes should

reflect characterization in extant literature. Different from the widely used inductive methods of coding often associated with the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013), in fsQCA coding is deductive, working from clearly established theoretical categories, and calibrated so that the cases at hand best reflect the characterization in extant literature (Douglas et al., 2020).

This technique is configurational, which is particularly helpful, as the support path is a combination of the entrepreneur's relationship to the supporter with the supporter's relationship to the third party (Fischer, 2011). As a set-theoretic approach, it provided tools to simplify the qualitative data in set-theoretic terms, where cases are coded according their membership in theoretically defined sets (Douglas et al., 2020). It is important to note that this analysis is exploratory. Failure to consistently explain a particular condition in relation to the outcome does not disprove the importance of the given feature, but rather shows that clarity regarding its relationship has not been obtained (Breiger, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2008).

First, we coded the cases regarding received resources (support): financial, social capital, advice, and emotional support. This was obtained first from the questionnaire sent to the entrepreneur. Regarding financial resources and social capital, only two supporters described in depth provided such support. Although there was much variation on provision of emotional support in entrepreneurs' full egocentric network, all the support relationships that were described in depth, and therefore here observed as cases, provided emotional support. Advising efforts, however, varied greatly among the observed cases. Because all of the cases provided emotional support and only some of them provided advice, we deemed them adequate for set-theoretical case comparison (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Schneider & Wagemann, 2010). Subsequently, we coded the cases—that is, support paths—for membership in sets that referred to mechanisms widely observed in social network literature: multiplexity, that is, whether there were more than one types of relationships among the actors (Kuwabara et al., 2010), pleasant affective experience and de-energizing affective experiences (Baron, 2008; Labianca & Brass, 2006; Nielsen, 2019; Small, 2017; St-Jean & Audet, 2009), friendship (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015; Newbert & Tornikoski, 2012),

deference to tenure and life experience (Dobrow et al., 2012; Ghosh, Haynes, & Kram, 2013; St-Jean & Mathieu, 2015), and whether the support path was a closed or open support triads, that is, whether the third party and the entrepreneur interacted as well (Burt, 1992; Grosser et al., 2019; Tortoriello & Krackhardt, 2010; Uzzi, 1996). We conducted fsQCA for each of the potential mechanisms in relation to advising in the support paths. Although we could see in the interviews that multiplexity and friendship were informative in understanding how relationships shape support, they were too nuanced to provide consistency within the duality of (non)membership in set-theoretic terms (see chapter IV). Positive affective experience was present in all cases, and therefore could not be compared.

As detailed below, the conditions that provided consistent comparative insights were deference to higher tenure and life experience, with closed support triads providing complementary insights when added to the analysis. Therefore, we turned to the theory of developmental relationships, which discusses how mentor and peer relationships support professionals in developing their projects and careers (Ahsan, Zheng, DeNoble, & Musteen, 2018; Dobrow et al., 2012; Kram & Isabella, 1985; St-Jean & Audet, 2012; St-Jean & Mathieu, 2015; Yip & Kram, 2017). We found striking parallels with our research design. Most importantly, we found a similar research gap requiring observation of conjunctions of direct and indirect relationships that are conducive to advising efforts (Chandler et al., 2011). Consistent with the set-theoretic fundamentals of fsQCA, we review here the theory of developmental relationships before continuing our analysis of support paths (Schneider & Wagemann, 2008, 2010).

3.2.4.2 Associating developmental relationships with advice

Developmental relationships are those where someone supports someone else to attend professional developmental needs by providing key resources, especially emotional support or advice (Cotton et al., 2011; Dobrow et al., 2012; Kram & Higgins, 2007; Kram & Isabella, 1985).

These relationships provide support in navigating professional contexts, such as organizational workspaces (Yip & Kram, 2017) and ecosystems (Chandler et al., 2011; St-Jean & Mathieu, 2015).

It should not seem a surprise that people seek for advice in developmental relationships: after all, finding advice requires knowing who is knowledgeable enough to advise (Cross et al., 2001). However, extant findings show that developmental relationships are primarily sought out for the emotional support they provide (Byrne & Shepherd, 2015; Eesley & Wang, 2017; Goswami et al., 2018; Huang & Knight, 2017; Mathias, Williams, & Smith, 2015; Wood & McKinley, 2010). What is unclear from existing research is what enables some supporters to be sources of advice to entrepreneurs, while others only provide emotional support (Nielsen, 2017). Chandler et al. (2011) strongly suggest adopting an “ecological” view, looking away from dyadic views and towards relational and institutional contexts around developmental relationships to address support outcomes (see also Dobrow Riza & Higgins, 2018).

These studies typically discuss the matter within an organizational framework, where these relationships are coordinated by managers and training programs (Chandler et al., 2011). In transposing this literature to our research question, we recognize that entrepreneurs are not embedded within an organization (Gedajlovic et al., 2013). Instead, they operate within a general relational and cultural setting (Spigel, 2017; Spigel & Harrison, 2018). Therefore, entrepreneurs turn to their own network to find supporters (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Newbert et al., 2013). Even those few entrepreneurs who are connected to accelerators, though they benefit from some formal matching efforts made by these institutions, ultimately rely on their own network to obtain developmental support, which might or might not adhere to the institutionalized expectations (Brinckmann, Villanueva, Grichnik, & Singh, 2019; Goswami et al., 2018). To this end, we see supporters’ relationships with third parties as a means to begin exploring such contextual relational mechanisms surrounding advising (Hmieleski, Carr, & Baron, 2015; Wood & McKinley, 2010; Wuebker, Hampl, & Wüstenhagen, 2015).

3.2.4.3 Calibrating the outcome condition (Advising)

The case was coded “1,0” if the entrepreneur signaled that the supporter provided advice and “0,0” otherwise. This was primarily obtained from the questionnaire, where the knowledge content of the advice was indicated. If the entrepreneurs indicated in the questionnaire that they had received a particular type of advice, but in the interview had not cited any needs for this knowledge when describing their needs and challenges, we understood that such advice was less relevant. We coded these cases at “0,6” because they in fact could rely on advice if, at some point, it became necessary, even if the advice itself was irrelevant when they reported it (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Cross et al., 2001).⁷

3.2.4.4 Calibrating the relationships along support paths

Each relationship in the support path is taken as a condition of its own. Because we look for access to knowledge held by actors in support paths, we started by coding support paths according to deference to more extensive professional experience (Zhang, 2011). Extant literature on developmental relationships provides a meaningful theoretical discussion on professional experience as an indicator of support resources for professional challenges (for example, Chandler et al., 2011; Cotton, Shen, & Livne-Tarandach, 2011; Dobrow Riza & Higgins, 2018; Kram & Isabella, 1985).

In this literature, a relationship to someone of more extensive professional experience is referred to as a “mentor relationship”. When we saw that the actors in the relationship defer to the upstream actor’s more extensive professional experience, we coded it “1,0”, as a mentor relationship (Chandler et al., 2011; Kram & Isabella, 1985). Conversely, if such difference in professional experience was not highlighted by informants as notable features of the relationship, it was scored as “0,0”. We understand this to be a peer relationship, where similarity carries with

⁷ We initially coded these cases at values at “0,4”, below the point of maximum ambiguity indicating that they were essentially cases where significant advice failed to obtain. The solutions achieved in these analyses proved difficult to interpret, since it conflated cases that received some form of advice with cases where no advice was obtained at all.

it a great deal of reciprocal mutual support (Cotton et al., 2011; Kram & Isabella, 1985)⁸. We observed this in regards to actors' deference because descriptions of relationships in a network should be meaningful to the observed actors (Gould & Fernandez, 1989). The condition is relational, rather than absolute, because it refers to the comparison between the two actors. Asymmetry and directionality are key in calibrating this condition.

For some relationships, even though there was light reference to difference in professional experience, the interviewee would describe in great lengths that they were going through similar challenges and that their attitude in the relationship was one of equality, which is similar to the reciprocal mutual support that is associated with peer support relationships (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Kuhn & Galloway, 2015). This would not be a simple peer relationship, however, because if the actor of more extensive professional experience felt the need to impose themselves 'downstream', they would invoke their professional experience as a claim to relevant knowledge. In the same way, a 'downstream' actor in a relationship that valued reciprocity might respectfully defer to signals of their counterpart's extensive experience. These situations of reciprocity while deferring to a claim to superior experience were considered more similar to mentor relationships than peer relationships. We coded this "occasional deference" as "0,7"⁹.

Our analysis starts with two assumptions about the limitations at hand in these support paths. First, we assume that because mentors have more experience in the field, they have great stocks of knowledge. But the knowledge stemming from this experience is somewhat removed from the intricacies of the entrepreneur's situation, and therefore might not be usable (St-Jean & Audet, 2009). Second, we assume that peers are more closely in tune with the intricacies of the entrepreneurs' situation, enhancing their understanding of what is usable, but are limited in their

⁸ The negation of "deference to more extensive professional experience" could be understood as "no deference", which could still mean that there is still an unacknowledged difference of professional experience between the actors. However, in our cases, when there was no deference to such a difference, they were, in fact, similar in professional experience. Therefore, we take the negation of this to mean "not different", or simply, similar. Therefore, the theory of developmental relationships regarding peers should apply.

⁹ We also performed analyses coding these cases as '0.9' and '0.6', with little change in the identified solutions. Coding these as '0.7' rendered more conservative consistency scores than '0.9', while '0.6' overly relativized the theoretical importance of deference.

professional experience and, therefore, have less knowledge to offer (Chatterji et al., 2019; Kuhn & Galloway, 2015). Most importantly, we suspect that supporters' relationships with mentor or peer third parties can offset these limitations and enhance the qualities of these relationships. These assumptions further guide our within-case analysis, where we find how the consistent solutions enhance the translation of knowledge into advice through the relational flow along the support path (Carlile, 2002, 2004).

3.2.4.5 Triadic closure and more experienced third parties

Although the relational path of interest for knowledge flow goes through the supporter, there is a possibility that the entrepreneur and the third party also have a relationship, thereby forming a closed support triad (Krackhardt, 1999; Lomi et al., 2013; Obstfeld, 2005). To code for the condition of triadic closure, we first observe the mentions of the third party in the interviews with the entrepreneurs. When we find that the entrepreneur had, indeed, mentioned the third party in the interview, we understand that this is a matter of membership in the closed support triad condition. Full membership, that is, a score of "1,0", was attributed when entrepreneurs described ways in which they regularly or deeply confide in the third party in any matter of life (not restricted to business matters). This would mean that they had an important role in the entrepreneurs' life. When the entrepreneur mentioned the third party in passing, acknowledging minor significance of the third party's presence in their network to their support story, this was coded as partial membership, "0,7". Conversely, when the supporter did not indicate that the entrepreneur and the third party interacted and there was no mention of the third party in the entrepreneur's interview, this was coded as full non-membership, "0,0". However, when the supporter explicitly indicated that the entrepreneur interacted with the third party and the entrepreneur's interview was still completely devoid of mentions of the third party, this was coded as "0,3".

Table 3.1 – Codes for membership scores

Advice	
Received advice on an expressed problematic topic	1,0
Received advice on a topic that was not expressed to be problematic	0,6
Did not receive advice	0,0
Mentors/peer condition (deference to professional tenure/life experience)	
Age/hierarchical difference between actors	1,0
Age/hierarchical difference with reciprocity between actors	0,7
No age/hierarchical difference with reciprocity between actors	0,0
Upstream peer actor does not receive any form of support from downstream actor (violates reciprocity assumption).	Exclude
Triadic closure (interaction between entrepreneur and third party)	
The entrepreneur is at least as close to the third party as the supporter	1,0
The entrepreneur is less close to third party than the supporter	0,7
The third party knows of the entrepreneur but wasn't cited by entrepreneur	0,3
The third party doesn't know the entrepreneur	0,0
Difference in status between third party and entrepreneur	
Age/hierarchical difference between entrepreneur and third party	1,0
No age/hierarchical difference with mutual mentoring between actors	0,0

We use the codes described above and summarized in Table 3.1. Support paths in our cases are described in Table 3.2, where they are presented with their respective fuzzy-set codes for fsQCA.

3.2.4.6 Truth table

Throughout this analysis, we explore the possible combinations of peers and mentors along support paths, which are “mentor-mentor”, “peer-mentor”, “mentor-peer”, and “peer-peer”. Additionally, these are observed along open and closed support triads, resulting in eight possible solutions, forming what is referred to in fsQCA as a “truth table” (Douglas et al., 2020; Duşa, 2019; Ragin, 2008). These possible solutions are represented in Table 3.3. Our analysis starts with two assumptions about the limitations at hand in these support paths. First, that mentors have more experience in the field, but that the knowledge stemming from this experience is somewhat removed from the intricacies of the entrepreneur’s situation, and therefore might not be applicable

Table 3.2 – Case overview and fsQCA data

Case Pseudonym	Business focus	Supporter	Third Party
Alliance	Tourism	Friend Mentor/peer: 0.0 Advice: 1.0	Former hierarchical superior, current friend Mentor/peer: 0,7 Triadic closure: 0,0
			Friend Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 0,3
Beam	Translation services	Brother Mentor/peer: 0.0 Advice: 0.6	Mother Mentor/peer: 0,7 Triadic closure: 1,0
			Wife Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 0,7
Chord-Olegário	HR services	Representative of major consulting firm allocated in co-working space Mentor/peer: 0.0 Advice: 1.0	Current hierarchical superior Mentor/peer: 1,0 Triadic closure: 0,3
Chord-Teresinha			CEO of neighbor startup in co-working space Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 0,3
Echoes	Education	Coordinator of co-working space and longtime advisor Mentor/peer: 0.7 Advice: 0.0	Current hierarchical superior Mentor/peer: 0,7 Triadic closure: 0,0
			Mentor, former vocational-school teacher Mentor/peer: 0,7 Triadic closure: 0,0
Five	Education	Mother Mentor/peer: 1.0 Advice: 1.0	Advisor Mentor/peer: 1,0 Triadic closure: 0,3
Genes	Retail / Education	Friend Mentor/peer: 1.0 Advice: 1.0	Agent Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 0,0
			House-mate, ex-husband, business partner Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 1,0
Hour	Business intelligence	Friend and CEO of neighbor startup in co-working space Mentor/peer: 0.7 Advice: 0.6	Friend Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 0,3
			Friend Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 0,7
Ice	Education	Friend and CEO of neighbor startup in co-working space Mentor/peer: 0.0 Advice: 0.0	Wife Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 0,3
			Coach Mentor/peer: 1,0 Triadic closure: 0,0
Joystick-Bruno	Information systems	Friend (Former hierarchical superior in beginning of entrepreneur's career) Mentor/peer: 1.0 Advice: 0.0	Formal Mentor Mentor/peer: 1,0 Triadic closure: 0,7
			Friend and CEO of neighbor startup in co-working space Mentor/peer: 0,7 Triadic closure: 0,0
Joystick-Jorge	Information systems	Friend Mentor/peer: 0.0 Advice: 1.0	Friend and co-worker Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 0,0
			Former student Mentor/peer: Exclude ¹⁰ Triadic closure: 0,0
Light	Business intelligence	Friend Mentor/peer: 0.0 Advice: 1.0	Friend Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 0,0
			Friend Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 0,0
Light	Business intelligence	Friend and former colleague at previous desk job Mentor/peer: 0.0 Advice: 1.0	Friend Mentor/peer: 0,0 Triadic closure: 0,0

¹⁰ At first, this third party was seen by the supporter as having less claim to life experience and tenure than himself, which would not fully qualify this third party as a peer. However, the third party did not reciprocate the support received from the supporter, thereby fully failing to qualify as a peer (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Excluding this path meant that the other third party, a true peer to the mentor, was preserved in the analysis. This did not change the calculations of fsQCA in any way, but rather preserved the coherence of set theoretic coding. This third party was maintained for the triadic closure analysis, since he was clearly had the same professional tenure as the entrepreneur. This particular path also proved insightful inasmuch as it informed a situation where advising failed to occur.

Table 3.3 – Truth table for advising in support paths

Support path	Mentor-mentor (closed)	Peer-mentor (closed)	Mentor-Peer (closed)	Peer-peer (closed)	Mentor-mentor (open)	Peer-mentor (open)	Mentor-Peer (open)	Peer-peer (open)
Mentor/peer Entrepreneur ← Supporter	●	⊗	●	⊗	●	⊗	●	⊗
Mentor/peer Supporter ← Third party	●	●	⊗	⊗	●	●	⊗	⊗
Triadic closure	●	●	●	●	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗

Solid circles (●) indicate the presence of the condition—here, deference to superior professional tenure or life experience, or “mentors”—and crossed circles (⊗) indicate its negation—here lack of difference in status, or “peers”, as well as closed triads. (Fiss, 2011)

(St-Jean & Audet, 2009). Second, that peers are more closely in tune with the intricacies of the entrepreneurs’ situation, but are limited in their experience in the field (Chatterji et al., 2019; Kuhn & Galloway, 2015). We assume that relationships with third parties can offset these limitations and enhance supporters’ qualities. These assumptions further guide our within-case analysis, where we find how the consistent solutions enhance the translation of knowledge into advice through the relational flow along the support path (Carlile, 2002, 2004).

We use 21 support paths available in our exploration of the combinations, as described in detail in the Results section. Because the outcome condition, advising, is connected to the supporter, analyses are done in sets of 12 support paths. Further discernment of the origins of the knowledge translated into advice were obtained in the subsequent analysis of the content of these interviews, when seeking out the specific mechanisms which enabled supporters to advise in certain configurations. In the within-case analysis, we closely observe the content of the interviews to track the themes in supporters’ experience in the indirect relationship against the descriptions of the rendered support (Schneider & Rohlfing, 2013).

3.2.4.7 Solutions and consistency

Consistency indicates the extent to which few or none of the cases contradicts the solution by having a given configuration but not the outcome, that is, advising. Some cases might not have

the consistent solution, but nevertheless achieve the outcome, which is indicated when a solution has low coverage. When this happens, it indicates that the solution is sufficient for achieving the outcome but is not necessary. While coverage is useful for descriptive purposes, consistency is an important indicator of how sufficient the solution actually is in associating with the outcome of interest, that is, advising (Douglas et al., 2020; Duşa, 2019).

All of the consistencies of the solutions reported here are at least 0,8, following the default setting in fsQCA 3.0 (Ragin & Davey, 2016), which is higher than the minimum of 0,75 suggested by Schneider and Wagemann (2010). Due to the richness of the qualitative material, the solutions should be interpreted and theorized by performing a within-case analysis to inform the relation between solutions and outcomes and enhancing understanding of the cases that posed contradictions, that is, they had the consistent solution which was found sufficient for the outcome, but where the outcome did not happen (Schneider & Rohlfing, 2013). We use the consistent solutions to subsequently approach the content of the interviews, scanning them for insight into the relational mechanisms that enable advising.

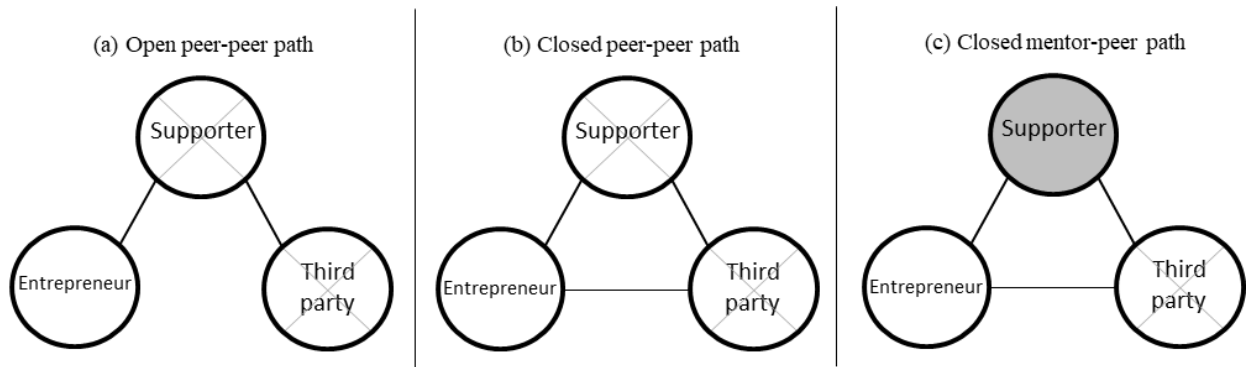
3.3 RESULTS FROM THE CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS (fsQCA)

Recognizing usable knowledge as a key resource for entrepreneurs, we inquire about configurations of support relationships that are associated with advising efforts from supporters. Our intuition is that combinations of certain relational features along direct and indirect relationships (that is, support paths) are conducive to flows of usable knowledge to entrepreneurs. Our research question is, how do support paths enable supporters to transfer knowledge to entrepreneurs? To this end, we report here the sufficient relational conditions for supporters' advising efforts obtained through fsQCA. Subsequently, we delve deeper into the cases to understand the mechanisms through which these conditions generate flows of usable knowledge. Figure 3.2 expresses the three sufficient relational conditions for advising in support paths. The results from fsQCA are reported in Table 3.4 below. Note that the support path described in the

center of figure 2, “closed peer-peer path”, is contained in the two solutions described in table 3.4 due to equifinality and can be logically reduced in order to identify sufficient relational conditions.

Here, we see two solutions that are sufficient for supporters to advise entrepreneurs and establish flows of usable knowledge. The first one is that both the supporter and the third party are peers to the entrepreneur, that is, they are of similar professional tenure or life experience. This is surprising, since peers, compared to mentors, would seem to have the least claim to knowledge that would be worthy of passing on as advice. However, this is in line to the discussion in developmental relationship literature, where the value of peers for support has been explicitly demonstrated

Figure 3.2 – Sufficient relational conditions for advising



A shaded circle indicates the presence of difference in professional experience (mentor) and a crossed out circle indicates the negation of this difference (peer).

Table 3.4 – Sufficient conditions for advising in support paths

	Peer-peer	Closed support triad, peer third party
Entrepreneur ← Supporter	⊗	
Supporter ← Third party	⊗	⊗
Interaction between entrepreneur and third party		●
Raw coverage	0,63	0,39
Solution coverage	0,84	
Solution consistency	0,90	
Solid circles (●) indicate the presence of the condition and crossed circles (⊗) indicate its negation. Lack of a circle indicates equifinality, that is both presence and absence are sufficient to obtain the outcome. Smaller circles indicate that the condition is not core to the solution. (Fiss, 2011)		

(Dobrow Riza & Higgins, 2018; Higgins, Dobrow, & Roloff, 2017; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Marcinkus Murphy & Kram, 2010). Similar clues have been found in entrepreneurship studies regarding direct relationships (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015; Lerner & Malmendier, 2013), while mentor relationships have been suggested to be unreliable (Goswami et al., 2018). We add to this discussion that it is not just direct relationships to peers, but also indirect relationships to peers, that are sufficient for establishing flows of usable knowledge. In this solution, open and closed support triads are equifinal, that is, supporters advise both when the third party and the entrepreneur interact with each other *and* when they do not. This solution includes triads (a) and (b) in Figure 2.

The second solution, on the other hand, emphasizes the closed support triad, describing both triads (b) and (c) in Figure 2. Here, a peer relationship between the third party and the supporter plays a minor role, again demonstrating the importance of indirect peer relationships. Although the peer/mentor condition in the direct relationship is equifinal, this solution is interesting because it includes direct mentor relationships, something that the peer-peer solution did not. This solution demonstrates when mentors are a source of flows of usable knowledge. Simply put, when the entrepreneur and third party are connected to each other, mentors advise entrepreneurs.

3.3.1 Robustness checks

3.3.1.1 Necessary conditions and limited diversity

Firstly, the necessary condition analysis was done for the above analysis, observing the combination of triadic closure with the mentor/peer condition in the two relationships around the supporter. This showed consistency of 0,54, indicating that this combination is not a superset of the outcome, and coverage of 0,6, indicating only moderate empirical relevance of necessity. Therefore, we see the above solutions as sufficient but not necessary conditions for advising to occur. On the other hand, we see a relationship of necessity when observing the mentor/peer conditions separately. For the relationship between entrepreneurs and supporters, consistency is 0,71 and coverage is 0,77, and for the relationship between supporters and third parties, consistency

is 0,91 and coverage is 0,78. That is, each of these peer relationships is necessary but not sufficient. Triadic closure, however, has a consistency of only 0,39 and coverage of 0,88, indicating a relationship of sufficiency with supporters advising efforts.

When observing triadic closure in combination with the mentor/peer conditions along relationships, two lines of the truth table were not available: the closed mentor-peer path and closed mentor-mentor path. It would seem that, in support stories, peers play a strong role. Remember that the support path is discursive, where actors choose particularly relevant relationships that they feel express their experience of supporting and being supported. Given the opportunity to freely elect relationships, respondents rarely describe closed support triads with mentors. We believe that this is a matter of limited diversity, especially considering that the converse, open peer-peer path, was highly common in the stories. Therefore, we performed alternative analyses that had complete truth tables by analyzing triadic closure separate from the mentor/peer condition, using alternative approaches to choosing third parties.

3.3.1.2 Mentor/peer relational conditions along the support path

We began our analysis by using the highest score for mentoring between the third parties and the supporter, following the assumption that greater professional tenure or life experience would be a source for usable knowledge. In this analysis, the “peer-peer” support path proved conducive for supporters to advise the entrepreneur. While consistency at this point is high (1,0), the coverage score is quite low (0,35). In fact, only two cases, were members of this solution. Here, consistency is high (1,0) because both cases were coded “1,0” for advising. We then performed the analysis using the lowest scores between each pair of third parties, singling out the closest each case had to a peer to the supporter. The solution for mentoring along the support path is the same as before, but now coverage has increased to 0,63, suggesting that this solution includes several of the cases where supporters advise. It is also quite robust, with consistency at 0,88 (Duşa, 2019; Schneider & Wagemann, 2010). The number of cases that are members of this solution rose to five. We see here

that, while mentor relationships fail to appear here as sufficient conditions for advice, the ‘peer-peer’ solution is surprisingly sufficient for supporters to advise entrepreneurs (Cotton et al., 2011; Higgins & Kram, 2001). This includes triads (a) and (b) in Figure 2 and is demonstrated in Table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5 – Complex solution for advising from mentor conditions along support paths (minimum scores)

	Peer-peer
Entrepreneur ← Supporter	⊗
Supporter ← Third party	⊗
Raw coverage	0,63
Solution coverage	0,63
Solution consistency	0,88
Solid circles (●) indicate the presence of the condition and crossed circles (⊗) indicate its negation (Fiss, 2011).	

3.3.1.3 Triadic closure of the support path

As another alternative explanation, we considered that, in matters of closed support triads, it might be more relevant whether the entrepreneur and the third party were similar or different in their life experience or professional closure. This would require recoding because in cases where the supporter was a mentor (dissimilar) to the entrepreneur and the third party was a peer (similar) to the supporter, logically the third party had greater life experience or professional tenure than the entrepreneur. We used a simple “crisp set” verification of dissimilarity (dissimilarity = “1,0”, similarity = “0,0”), because the research question revolves around the advice-giving efforts of the supporter, and not those of the third party.

Using the minimum scores for the dissimilar life/professional experience condition of the third party and the corresponding closed support triad condition for that relationship, we find two sufficient conditions (solution coverage, 0,80; solution consistency, 0,92)¹¹. Firstly, we find similarity between the entrepreneur and the third party is sufficient for supporters to advise

¹¹ Using the maximum scores for the dissimilar life/professional experience condition of the third party and the corresponding closed triad condition for that relationship, we find that closed triads with similar third parties is sufficient for supporters to advise entrepreneurs (consistency, 1,0; raw coverage, 0,24; 2 cases).

(consistency, 0,92; raw coverage, 0,56; 5 cases). It is worth noting that, for this solution, both closed and open support triads are equifinal, that is, knowledge flows to the entrepreneur via the supporter whether or not the third party and the entrepreneur interact with each other. This solution is analogous to all the triads in Figure 2.

Table 3.6 – Complex solutions for closed support triads with minimum scores for third parties of higher tenure/experience

	Similar status	Closed support triad
Third party of higher experience than entrepreneur	⊗	
Interaction between entrepreneur and third party		●
Raw coverage	0,56	0,39
Solution coverage	0,80	
Solution consistency	0,90	
Solid circles (●) indicate the presence of the condition and crossed circles (⊗) indicate its negation. Lack of a circle indicates equifinality, that is both presence and absence are sufficient to obtain the outcome (Fiss, 2011).		

The second solution obtained here is closed support triads (consistency, 0,88; raw coverage, 0,39; 3 cases). In this solution, a closed support triad is associated with advising supporters, regardless whether the third party has more professional tenure or life experience. This is interesting because it includes third parties who are more experienced than the entrepreneur, and therefore are associated with the mentor-peer, mentor-mentor, or peer-mentor solutions. This solution is analogous to triads (b) and (c) from Figure 2. Table 3.6 describes this solution.

The findings from fsQCA have been helpful in establishing sufficient relational conditions that enable supporters to advise entrepreneurs: supporters relating to their own peers draw from knowledge developed in these relationships when advising entrepreneurs. Following Schneider and Rohlfing (2013), we turn now to the content of the cases we have analyzed above to find the ways these configurations of mentor and peer relationships along the support paths enable supporters to advise. Here, we search for ways the relationship with the third parties who are peers to the supporter enable supporters to advise entrepreneurs.

3.4 RESULTS FROM THE WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS

3.4.1 Exploring the Sufficient Relational Conditions Through Within-Case Analysis

We have found that the sufficient relational conditions for advising are “peer-peers” and “closed triad”. While very informative, this does not reveal, yet, *how* these support paths enable advising. In this section, we take full advantage of the rich interview data at hand (Schneider and Rohlfing, 2013; see also Bernhard, 2018 and Herz et al., 2014). This within-case analysis serves as an empirical basis for generating propositions. In this section, we explore the cases that fall along the three triads in Figure 2 and which were logically reduced to the two solutions reported in Table 4.

3.4.2 Open peer-peer path

The case Joystick-Jorge was distinctive in that it was one of the two clearest examples of a peer-peer support path where advice was obtained. The entrepreneur, Fabrício, is the technical director and founder of a technology-intensive venture. He stressed that the supporter, Jorge (peer), alongside a strong personal relationship, gives him technical advice that comes from the surrounding context, even though the peer supporter is not an entrepreneur:

“But, you know, his knowledge, what he has done, his involvement in the market, they are great for this sort of relationship we have. [...] So sometimes I have questions, ‘hey, how do I solve such and such a problem’, but always at a computational level. Then he gives a list of suggestions, what he has done before, or even refers to people, ‘talk to so and so, he solved it this way.’ ” (Joystick-Jorge, entrepreneur)

This knowledge is valuable to the entrepreneur not only because it strengthens the solutions he is able to develop technically, but also because it boosts his position on his board of directors: the board expects him to be the authority on technical issues. The peer supporter, on the other hand, sees himself as somewhat inferior to the entrepreneur in life matters, saying that he feels like he is “talking to an older brother”. But when it comes around to technical issues, he takes on the role of an informal, unpaid, consultant.

The third party, Anderson, is a young genius in the technology in which they are interested. Often, Jorge can bring issues that Fabrício is tackling to his peer third party. This sort of conversation also keeps Jorge sharp when the entrepreneur (or similar people in his network) bring him questions. In this case, there is no need for triadic closure, that is, the third party and entrepreneur do not need to have a relationship amongst themselves because the supporter ‘repackages’ elements brought in by the third party into specific solutions that meet the entrepreneur’s needs (Vissa & Chacar, 2009).

But the third party brings something else that encourages Jorge to transfer usable knowledge: validation.

“I had sort of an impostor syndrome. [...] And Anderson helped me see this, this problem, and he said, ‘you’re good at what you do! Everyone says it. Do you think everyone is making this up?’ And I said, ‘Right!’ [...] I’m not a specialist, I’m a generalist, and today in the company I am in, from what I see on the market [...] I see that this is a type of professional that is seen in a good light.”

Joystick-Jorge, peer-peer

Alongside access to the third party’s knowledge, the peer supporter’s relationship with a third party also provides supporters *access to their own knowledge*. The supporter’s lack of confidence in his own knowledge is a matter solved within the relationship with the third party, where the effects of increased confidence spill over into the supporter’s other relationships. We see, therefore, that the peer supporter is able to give the entrepreneur advice because the relationship with the third party reveals to the peer supporter the value of the stock of knowledge he, himself, holds.

3.4.3 Closed peer-peer path

It could be inferred that, if the entrepreneur and the third party interact, then the third party would actually be a supporter, and there would be a possible direct flow of knowledge between them. This is not necessarily the case. Here, we demonstrate how there is a relational explanation for the supporter and third party to have distinct roles in the support path.

Although the entrepreneur and the third party interact, there might be relational barriers between them that stifle direct flows of knowledge between them, requiring the mediation of the supporter. Beam is a prime example. Here, the entrepreneur mentioned the third party (her sister-in-law) in the interview, stating that when she asks the third party for business-related advice she only gets “obvious answers” (although her sister-in-law is quite helpful for romantic advice). This contrasted from her depiction of the support from her peer supporter (her brother), from whom she gets business-related advice that she feels is insightful. On the other hand, her peer supporter (brother) attributed his business insight to his shared experience with the peer third party (his wife, the entrepreneur’s sister-in-law). In his words, he is the “gas pedal” and his wife is the “brake” in their own endeavors (business and otherwise). This knowledge-generating interaction is enhanced by the fact that both the supporter and the third party have personal relationships with the entrepreneur. When the entrepreneur is not present, the two of them discuss the entrepreneur’s challenges with each other. The peer supporter is able to pass on insightful advice which the third party is unable to communicate directly to her sister-in-law, the entrepreneur. A similar dynamic around family ties happens around the mentor supporter in the case Five.

Outside of family dynamics, a similar situation happens in Chord-Olegário. Here, both the entrepreneur and the peer supporter have previous startup experience, where the supporter managed to build and sell a multi-million venture. However, has taken up a job in a large consulting firm, which he represents as an available in-house consultant in the co-working space where Chord is located, where he scouts out solutions that could be sold to his consulting firm’s global clients. He simply sets up his laptop in an open space, where he is available for entrepreneurs who wish to approach him. In the closed peer-peer support path of this case, his third party is another entrepreneur in the co-working space. By relating to these similar entrepreneurs, he becomes more aware of the idiosyncratic challenges they face and learns how to advise them through these challenges, generating energizing conversations that translate and relay usable knowledge. This overcomes a barrier between the entrepreneur and the third party due to rivalry and competitiveness

stemming from their similar status, or a barrier simply stemming from physical distance, occupying different floors of the building.

Such barriers show that not all relationships are equal when it comes to knowledge flows because the characteristics of any given relationship lend themselves to different, unique, conversations. While such characteristics are conducive for certain conversations, barriers arise that make it difficult to engage in other conversations. Supporters are unique in the story of support to the entrepreneur because their relationships are conducive to conversations that enable flows of usable knowledge.

3.4.4 Closing peer-peer path

Until this point, we have described the support path as a channel that flows towards the entrepreneur, where the relationship to the third party generates and transfers knowledge to the supporter. In this section, we describe how reciprocity in indirect relationships to third parties provide conditions that sustain supporters' advising efforts to entrepreneurs. That is, third parties also receive support from entrepreneurs' peer supporters.

Consider Alliance. All actors described in this case by both the entrepreneur and the supporter share a dissatisfaction with their particular profession (they all majored in the same field), and see running their own operations, either as individual freelancers or as founders of a business, as the way out. To do so, they need to overcome their lack of business skills, since their training gave barely any insight in this regard. They are all in a network of friends that came from small towns to the big city to pursue a career in the same field. The peer supporter, Gregório, however, provides the entrepreneur with input for business strategy, even though he has never been an entrepreneur. Support is reciprocal: Gregório says of the entrepreneur, "He is a friend to confide in, like, 'I'm sick and tired of my work, I'm thinking of getting out'. When I had the proposal to move to Rio, I asked his opinion."

The peer third party went to college with Gregório, but because of the birth of his child, feels locked in the profession with which they are all dissatisfied. His dissatisfaction has grown to the point that he is seriously considering opening his own business, including doing the same as the entrepreneur. “I’m putting him in touch with the entrepreneur, they know each other, but, anyway, they’ve never talked about this before.” Gregório saw the entrepreneur as a *source* of valuable knowledge for the third party and put them in touch with each other so the *entrepreneur* could provide advice. This is an effort on the supporter’s part to strengthen their whole support network they refer to as “hicks in the big city” (see Jack *et al.*, 2004). The entrepreneur who is a recipient of advice also becomes the distributor of advice (see Newbert and Tornikoski, 2012). Conversely, when Gregório plays the role of a distributor of advice and strengthens their support network, he feels valued (“when they ask me my opinion, I feel honored”), even though he has not broken out of the frustrating profession.

A similar dynamic happens in case Genes, where the mentor supporter has a prominent role in a network of people who share a deep, serious interest in building miniature model cars, which happens to be the entrepreneur’s main product. Here, the supporter is a mentor to the entrepreneur, yet is a peer to the described third parties. These third parties, however, provide a peer-to-peer view for the supporter of the subculture to which the entrepreneur provides services, especially one of the third parties, who displays the subculture in the coffee shop he owns and runs, thereby initiating conversations that forge new connections and share knowledge with those who also participate in this subculture.

In fact, the interviewer experienced this first-hand with Olegário, a supporter to Chord. The founder of another startup happened to walk in on us at the very beginning of the interview, and they engaged in a short, yet enthusiastic conversation, where Olegário already started offering his knowledge. Olegário then said, “Have you met this social scientist? Dude, you’ve got to meet him! He’s fantastic! You can learn so much from him!” This was beneficial to us, as it opened the way that ultimately accessed Echoes. More importantly, it also positioned Olegário as someone who

makes helpful connections: at this co-working space, people frequently asked us, “have you met Olegário?” or stated, “you have to talk with Olegário.”

Out of these peer-to-peer conversations the supporter gains information that can be relayed in the form of market-related advice to the entrepreneur. These support paths confer the entrepreneur’s supporter a role in the wider network. When supporters dispense usable knowledge that they have generated throughout their own relationships, they establish their roles as an “advisor”. When they find opportunities to enhance the density of the surrounding support network by putting third parties in contact with entrepreneurs, they take on the role of “articulators” of the support network.

3.4.5 When advice does not occur

We have demonstrated above some sufficient relational conditions in support paths for supporters to advise entrepreneurs. The cases also provide some clues regarding certain relational challenges that can constrain, or even inhibit, supporters in rendering usable knowledge when faced with entrepreneurs’ challenges.

In Joystick - Bruno, the supporter speculated about difficulties that the entrepreneur faces or might come to face. Such speculation was not described as if it emerged from his conversation with the entrepreneur. Rather, he stated that he did not know of specific challenges that the entrepreneur was facing, but deduced challenges out of his own knowledge of information technology and the specific solutions the entrepreneur was seeking to provide. The entrepreneur, in the mentor supporter’s view, refrains from bringing him more difficult challenges, even though the mentor supporter provides emotional support. The mentor supporter also described his own relationship with a former student and fellow academic who he advised as this contact pursued a master’s degree.¹² The latter relationship was tinged with frustration because this third party did not engage

¹² We excluded this third party from the analysis reported in section 3.3 because, while the status of the third party is inferior and, hence, could constitute a relationship with a peer as per our coding scheme, it lacked reciprocity (Parker et al., 2008), and therefore was unfit to include in the analysis. We see here that, even so, it actually upholds the same solution, and warrants a more in-depth interpretation in this section of the analysis.

in a more personal, deeper ongoing relationship, as the mentor himself prefers to carry on with those whom he advises. Although this supporter claims to place himself as readily available to the entrepreneur, this relationship does not result in advice because the mentor does not engage with his frustration with either the entrepreneur or the third party: he prefers to simply wait for them to come around and ask for advice.

Chord - Olegário, where the supporter is a successful entrepreneur who became consultant, also has an open peer-mentor configuration. From his extensive experience as an entrepreneur, Olegário feels that he has very much usable knowledge to contribute. However, he is placed close to entrepreneurs as a representative of his own firm's interest. This constraint is enacted in his conversations with the third party of superior status, his manager, who, himself, also built and sold a multi-million venture. In these conversations, they discuss the needs of the entrepreneurs alongside their own methodology and expectations for advising. Therefore, while Olegário explicitly recognizes his own stock of usable knowledge, at times he refrains from delivering this knowledge so that he respects the interests developed together with the third party.

In a nutshell, we set out to find what the sufficient relational conditions along support paths that enable a supporter to advise an entrepreneur. We have found that peer relationships between supporters and third parties enable peer and mentor supporters to advise entrepreneurs. Peers, specifically, are busy learning from similar challenges they have witnessed among their own contacts, including the entrepreneur, and build confidence in their own knowledge, while establishing their own position as providers of knowledge throughout their own network.

3.5 DISCUSSION

The knowledge entrepreneurs need is often obtained through support relationships (for example, Dubini & Aldrich, 1991; Galkina & Atkova, 2020; Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013). Therefore, we have looked into the relational conditions along support paths that enable supporters to advise entrepreneurs. Support paths are comprised of a supporter's relationship with an

entrepreneur combined with this supporter's relationship with a third party. Through pairs of interviews with both entrepreneurs and their supporters, we have looked into the sufficient relational conditions experienced in support paths that enable flows of usable knowledge to entrepreneurs. In these relationships with the third party on the one side and the entrepreneur on the other, the supporter is aware of the entrepreneur's need for support and is enabled to respond to this need through their relationship to the third party. Specifically regarding flows of knowledge, when supporters advise entrepreneurs, knowledge obtained in the relationship with the third party flows through the supporter's efforts to render it usable according to the entrepreneur's unique needs. The supporter's challenge lies in translating the obtained knowledge to the entrepreneurs specific need (Carlile, 2002, 2004).

Our across-case analysis, through fsQCA, has shown two sufficient conditions that enable such knowledge flows through supporters. Both solutions are sufficient, but neither one is necessary. They are not mutually exclusive, that is, both solutions can be present for supporters to advise entrepreneurs.

On the one hand, results show that experienced similarities among the three actors in the support path—that is, peer relationships—are conducive for flows of usable knowledge. A closer within-case inspection demonstrated that these similarities help supporters to better understand entrepreneurs' needs for specific knowledge and to translate the knowledge they can access to these specific needs. On the other hand, we have demonstrated as well that support paths comprised of closed triads—that is, where the entrepreneur and third party also interact meaningfully with each other—enable supporters to render advice to entrepreneurs. Our closer inspection of cases has shown that these support efforts can serve to better embed the supporter in the wider support network, as well as bring the entrepreneur closer to the expectations and framings of the supporter's network.

This study contributes to our understanding of support relationships to entrepreneurs by shifting our attention towards supporters' experience in rendering resources to entrepreneurs. This

intuition follows the understanding that supporters are agents (they “willingly” render resources) and, more importantly, that such agency is situated within relational contexts (Nielsen, 2019). Supporters’ own relationships enable and constrain their support efforts to entrepreneurs, while their support efforts to entrepreneurs enhance supporters’ own relationships, in what can be a virtuous cycle. We contribute to the literature on support networks around entrepreneurs by demonstrating that only certain relational conditions enable access to resources through supporters, especially demonstrating that mentors in the support path, be they supporters or third parties, are *not* sufficient for supporters to advise entrepreneurs. In line with advances in developmental support literature (Chandler et al., 2011; Dobrow Riza & Higgins, 2018; Dobrow et al., 2012) We propose that further discussions on support to entrepreneurs will gain a more complete view of this phenomenon by sampling beyond the entrepreneurs, who receive the support, and reach out to the supporters, who render support. By demonstrating that certain conditions enable knowledge flows along support paths, we show that supporters’ and third parties’ status as mentors or peers should not be taken for granted if we are to fully understand when and how vital resources (fail to) flow to entrepreneurs through their supporters.

In line with Anderson, Dodd, & Jack (2012), we contribute to the discussion of relationality in entrepreneurship by drawing attention to a particular network structure that grounds these discussions. Typically, these discussions have emphasized relationships as narratives and stories (e.g. Garud, Gehman, & Giuliani, 2014; Hjorth, 2007) and as practices (Steyaert & van Looy, 2010). While these approaches certainly make important claims that imply the social complexity introduced by indirect relationships connecting third parties beyond the supporter to the entrepreneur, without operationalizing these discussions in network structures, they more readily describe narratives and practices in relationships directly connected to the entrepreneur.

Other studies have explicitly discussed network structures (for example, Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998; Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013), but, similarly, even when problematizing how relationships can influence each other, their study remains focused on relationships directly

connected to the entrepreneur. Conversely, our results clearly indicate that even actors who are unconnected to the entrepreneur impinge on the knowledge that flows to entrepreneurs. This is an important influence that is often overlooked or, worse, taken for granted, portraying areas of the network as simple repositories of resources instead of vibrant relationships (Dubini & Aldrich, 1991; Martens, Jennings, & Jennings, 2007). Our argument hinges on the assumption that agency in support to entrepreneurs is distributed between entrepreneurs and supporters and that this agency is constrained and enabled within support paths (Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The ecosystem around entrepreneurs is more than pockets of resources or opportunities to be exploited. Support itself, as an effort to render resources, is embedded within enabling and constraining relational features throughout the ecosystem. We have demonstrated that these features can be structural (that is, embedding supporters and entrepreneurs within closed triads) or relational (that is, due to experienced relevant similarities among the actors—peers).

By grounding such discussions on network structures, studies of support to entrepreneurs are invited to follow “snowball sampling” techniques through supporters that can fully explore the complexity of the relational contexts around these narratives and practices of support relationships (see Nielsen, 2019). A structural approach that reaches beyond entrepreneurs’ direct relationships, such as the one we have demonstrated here, can contextualize narratives and practices in support relationships within other narratives and practices in relationships, first by streamlining complex and rich qualitative data, then subsequently enhancing the depth and nuance of such analyses. When future studies analyze triads that reveal the influence of support relationships on each other, these will be able to bridge the characteristics of networks of direct relationships to an entrepreneur (egonets) with studies of full networks that compose an ecosystem (for example, Spigel, 2017; Spigel & Harrison, 2018; see Jack, 2010).

Our study has shown that support is not simple extracted from or exchanged with supporters. Rather, we have begun to unpack what it means that support is rendered “willingly” (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007: 607). The supporters that we interviewed showed that they are motivated to

support because this enhances their own position in their own network. The support they render does not just enhance the entrepreneur's project, but situates it within their own movements to occupy their own social space and construct the local ecosystem (McKeever et al., 2015). Supporters' relationships with third parties, then, are able to shape the support they render because the usable knowledge is framed according to the expectations of several actors other than the entrepreneur that impinge on the supporter's achievement of his or her own motivations for participating in their network. That is, the supporter's interest in achieving and maintaining a role as advisor or an articulator of the support network makes them sensitive to the ways that they are expected to, or able to, support, given the relational configurations around them.

Proposition 1: Knowledge flows from supporters to entrepreneurs are enabled and constrained by relational conditions around supporters.

For knowledge to flow as advice, the supporter has to translate it into the entrepreneur's unique need for such knowledge (Carlile, 2002, 2004; St-Jean & Audet, 2009). Therefore, we have looked to status heterophily, that is, associations with more experienced, higher status supporters and third parties, because this would comprehensively be a source of relevant, tested, knowledge (Dominguez & Hager, 2013; Eesley & Wang, 2017; Parker, Kram, & Hall, 2012; St-Jean & Tremblay, 2011; van Emmerik, Gayle Baugh, & Euwema, 2005). Drawing from the developmental support literature, we operationalized this as mentorship (for example, Chandler et al., 2011; Dobrow Riza & Higgins, 2018; Kram & Isabella, 1985). To our surprise, we found that the converse, support paths completely comprised of status homophily, or peer relationships, are sufficient for useable knowledge to flow to entrepreneurs. We find, as well, that more is required for mentor relationships to be sufficient for supporters to advise entrepreneurs, namely, that the entrepreneur is embedded in the supporter's network. However, this is in line with the discussion in the developmental relationship literature, where the value of peers for support has been explicitly demonstrated (Dobrow Riza & Higgins, 2018; Higgins et al., 2017; Kram & Isabella, 1985;

Marcinkus Murphy & Kram, 2010). Similar clues have been found in entrepreneurship studies regarding direct peer relationships (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015; Lerner & Malmendier, 2013). Supporters are facilitators of flows of usable knowledge that is generated in relationships with third parties who experience similar unclear, unsettling issues (Parker et al., 2008; Spigel, 2017).

We add to the discussion on support by showing that direct relationships to peers are sufficient for flows of usable knowledge *when* they are aligned with indirect relationships to supporters' own peers. Our findings suggest the following theory of advising support relationships. Knowledge that flows as advice along support paths speaks to the unclear, unsettling issues faced by the entrepreneur (Chatterji et al., 2019; Hmieleski et al., 2015; Wood & McKinley, 2010). This knowledge is transferred, but not as a simple replication of existing information. Rather, it is translated to fit the entrepreneur's challenges, rendering it usable (Jack et al., 2004; St-Jean & Audet, 2009, 2012).

Proposition 2: The facilitation of knowledge flows establishes supporters' key role as a source of relevant knowledge, thereby validating the knowledge they can share and increasing their participation in the support network.

Burt (2004) indicated that actors who are in open triads are more prone to having good ideas, inasmuch as people who have relationships with people who are not connected amongst themselves would have access to novel, non-redundant knowledge. This would be problematic if entrepreneurs are to embed their supporters in their networks, as Newbert and Tornikoski (2013) suggests, since there would be a trade-off between closed networks around supporters and the quality of the knowledge that flows around them. Our results reconcile both of these results, inasmuch as we show that peer-peer support paths can enable a secure flow of knowledge even when supporters are not surrounded by the entrepreneur's relationships. This would also explain why the supporters described by McKeever, Anderson, and Jack (2014) are able to relay useable information that is out of the entrepreneur's direct reach. Such knowledge flows are secured because the position

occupied by supporters as network articulator and advisor are desirable to the supporters themselves.

Proposition 3: Support paths enable advice when the support path is composed of relationships among actors who are in similar situations that facilitate translation of knowledge to entrepreneurs' unique needs for advice.

In the peer-peer support paths, it would seem that the advice itself must be adapted to the entrepreneurs' unique situation. In this configuration, the supporter draws knowledge from similar situations experienced with their own third parties. Therefore, knowledge generated along similar peers can easily flow to the entrepreneur. This underscores the importance of peer relationships to knowledge flows (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Lerner & Malmendier, 2013; Parker et al., 2008). Our findings adds to the conditions Chatterji et al. (2019) found for consistent peer advice. Where they emphasized peer's personal features as conditions for peers to be expected to share their knowledge (previous managerial experience, holding an MBA), we see that indirect peer relationships are associated with advising efforts in these support paths. The reciprocal support which happens among peers provides a setting where these unclear, unsettling situations can be discussed and tested in different manners (Dobrow Riza & Higgins, 2018; Dobrow et al., 2012; Jack & Anderson, 2002). This flow of usable knowledge in reciprocal advising efforts along the support path is possible because translating efforts are relatively easy since entrepreneurs, supporters, and third parties find analogies in their own unsettling challenges (Carlile, 2002, 2004). Therefore, we strongly suggest that peer supporters and their own relationships be included in theorizing the considerations of supporters advising entrepreneurs, rather than restricting practices and investigations to direct mentor relationships.

Proposition 4: The facilitation of knowledge flows establishes supporters' key role as articulators of the support network, thereby enhancing their influence in the network.

In these peer-peer configurations, if the supporter chooses to embed the entrepreneur in their own network (note, triadic closure is optional in this configuration), they approach the entrepreneur's situation, bringing third parties closer to the knowledge generated with the entrepreneur and the entrepreneur's network. However, not all third parties require such approximation. This extends Newbert and Tornikoski's (2013) findings that embeddedness enhances resource flow to entrepreneurs, inasmuch as we see that their findings are sufficient, but not necessary, conditions for resource flows to entrepreneurs. In other words, not all supporters require such embeddedness and can transfer applicable resources generated with third parties who are unconnected to the entrepreneur. This is possible because the experiences among peers are similar enough to be easily translated into advice.

In the support paths that are closed triads, mentor relationships become sufficient conditions for knowledge to flow to the entrepreneur. Here, different from what happens in the peer-peer support paths, mentors make efforts to bring the entrepreneur into their own network. This is an inversion to Newbert and Tornikoski (2013), which was centered solely on entrepreneurs' views of their own support network. Instead of finding that entrepreneurs bring supporters into their own network, we see that supporters, to meet their own networking interests, connect entrepreneurs to *their* network.

Proposition 5: Support paths enable advice when the support relationship is embedded within a shared support network.

Faced with the challenge of translating knowledge into the entrepreneur's needs, mentor supporters make great efforts to convince the entrepreneur of the relevance of the knowledge by helping the entrepreneurs to adapt to challenges as framed and experienced by the supporter in their own relationships. In the long run, this shapes the entrepreneur's experience of unique needs for knowledge according to the supporter's network, rather than embedding the supporter in the entrepreneur's network. We would expect, therefore, that there is more space for cross-pollination of knowledge, drawn from two heterogeneous networks that are combined by the entrepreneur and

supporter's relationship (Burt, 2004). In fact, while securing flows of high quality, novel, reconfigurations of usable knowledge, it also provides a safe "cocoon" around emerging entrepreneurs, essentially securing both the benefit of brokerage positions, that is, the potential of generating insightful, usable knowledge, as well as the security of dense networks (Burt, 2019).

3.5.1 Alternative explanations and future research directions

Some clarification is in order around the limitations of the present study. We have chosen to study specific relational support paths to further advance understanding of the relational properties around knowledge sharing and generation in entrepreneurship, and we have chosen case-comparison through fsQCA to guide the analysis. While this choice teases out what happens relationally and allows expansion beyond a single dyad, this does not portray the entrepreneur's full portfolio of contacts, nor does it discuss the supporter's full portfolio of contacts. It is incorrect to understand from this analysis that in cases where the entrepreneur does not obtain advice from the supporter, the entrepreneur does not receive the necessary advice at all. In fact, as quite well represented in case "Joystick", we should understand that while the path described is not conducive to obtaining advice, the entrepreneur can find relevant advice from other supporters. Similarly, supporters rely on several third parties, through which they are able to overcome constraints established in the indirect tie, as described around the supporter, Olegário who is constrained by his hierarchical superior, but enabled by the peer third party. What is interesting for the present discussion is whether or not a *particular* support path is conducive to knowledge flows, and why.

We have chosen features of support paths that are comparable across all cases. In traditional correlational studies, covariates would be in order so that the separate effect of the different variables would be identified. We emphasize, however, that this is not a correlational study, but rather a configurational cross-case study, which looks for combinations which are sufficient to obtain the outcome (Ragin, 2008), an approach not uncommon in entrepreneurship studies

(Douglas et al., 2020; Kraus et al., 2018). To implement the present findings in a correlational study of support paths, these relationships should be combined as moderations of the feature of the supporter-third party relationship on the effect of the same feature as found in the supporter-entrepreneur relationship on the variable of interest.

3.6 CONCLUSION

We set out to explore how a supporters' own relationships with the entrepreneur (direct relationship) and with a third party (indirect relationship) enable knowledge flows in the form of advice. We have found that supporters' relationships with similar peers are sufficient conditions for achieving such flows. We have also found another, equifinal, sufficient relational condition: that the support path is a closed support triad, where the entrepreneur and the third party interact with each other. Most importantly, we have found that relationships around supporters have great implications for the support they are able to give. These relationships can validate the applicability of the supporter's knowledge, encourage their role within the wider advice network, set the tone for future knowledgeable interactions with entrepreneurs, and frame the issues around which the entrepreneur will receive advice.

Our study has emphasized the importance of recognizing supporters' agency in rendering support. Therefore, our managerial implications should reflect this emphasis. We recommend that entrepreneurs who wish to achieve and secure advice from their supporters open conversations that clearly describe their needs for support, and give space for supporters to respond to these needs. While entrepreneurs' efforts to embed supporters in their own network is good and well, they should also be mindful of the supporter's signals that can draw entrepreneurs closer to the supporters' network, as this will enhance the supporter's role as articulator and advisor in the wider support network.

Additionally, supporters and supportive institutions, such as incubators, training centers, and co-working spaces, that seek to enhance advice rendered to entrepreneurs are encouraged to explore

both mentor and peer relationships. Mentors and peers should be encouraged to reach out to their own peers, since it is the shared experience with the third parties that can provide them with a lens that shapes their advice to the entrepreneur. Mentors' networks should be welcomed into the support system supporters and supportive institutions provide, inasmuch as this inclusion will encourage mentors to support. Similarly, peer supporters should be validated in their support efforts. They can be encouraged to engage with the entrepreneur's network, and also to use these connections to enhance their support to their other peers. These peers do not need to explicitly bring their own peers into the entrepreneur's or the supportive institution's network, but should be encouraged to actively discuss matters of entrepreneurship with their own network.

Chapter 4

Support Fosters Homophily: How Entrepreneurs’ Supporters form Supportive Triads to Meet Their Own Relational Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship is increasingly considered as a social phenomenon, where proximal relationships contribute to the emergence of entrepreneurial projects. Complementing extant literature around entrepreneurs' direct support relationships, we examine how indirect relationships, connecting entrepreneurs' supporters to third parties, enables support for entrepreneurs. We refer to these combinations of relationships linking entrepreneurs to third parties through supporters as "support paths". We begin our analysis with Qualitative Structural Analysis to perform a within-case analysis of twenty-two support paths. This revealed themes across relationship accounts, providing insight as to how indirect relationships (supporter and third party) interplay with direct relationships (supporter and entrepreneur). Then, through across-case analysis, we compared these accounts in their cognitive, structural, and relational dimensions. Theorizing these results, we suggest that supporting is not limited to exchanging and accessing resources, but rather involves the development of relationships that allow actors to frame and face ongoing challenges. Specifically, we find evidence that supporters respond to entrepreneurs' signals of need for support as a means to enhance the peculiarity of the support path within and against the larger context of the surrounding network, experienced as pressures, opportunities, and threats. We also demonstrate ways in which third parties inspire and constrain supporters in their response to entrepreneurs' needs.

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is increasingly considered as a social phenomenon, where proximal relationships contribute to the emergence of entrepreneurial projects (Hjorth & Holt, 2016). Extant literature on support to entrepreneurs has typically developed studies from the perspective of entrepreneurs, rather than inquired into their supporters' reasons for engaging in such manner (for example, Dubini & Aldrich, 1991; Kotha & George, 2012; Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013). This takes for granted that supporters will "naturally" render resources to entrepreneurs, as long as the entrepreneur provides the right form of connections (for example, McKeever et al., 2015; Newbert et al., 2013). We challenge this by following a recent shift in the discussion that problematizes supporters and their own relationships (Nielsen, 2019), arguing that supporters have just as much agency in the creation of support ties as entrepreneurs do, putting in just as much effort and serving their own interests.

Hanlon and Saunders (2007: 602) define supporters as actors who "willingly provide" entrepreneurs "access to a valued resource". Some of the most important "resources" provided to entrepreneurs are knowledge and emotional support (Cope, 2011; Hanlon & Saunders, 2007;

Nielsen, 2017). These are resources that resist a transaction view, since they do not simply flow from one set of hands to the next (Borgatti, 2005; Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010). Therefore, it makes more sense to approach these support networks as prisms (Podolny, 2001). Support is a practice that establishes and develops relationships (Steyaert & van Looy, 2010), embedded within other practices across supporters' own relationships (Bouwen, 2010). This situates support within a nexus of experienced relationships (Hjorth, 2007). We examine how indirect relationships, connecting entrepreneurs' supporters to third parties, enables support for entrepreneurs. We refer to these combinations of relationships as "support paths". How do support paths around supporters shape supportive relational practices to entrepreneurs?

Entrepreneurs' and supporters' experiences comes to the foreground when discussing relational practices (Hosking, 2010). To achieve this formally, we describe support paths in terms of cognitive, relational, and structural dimensions (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). While Nielsen (2019) used quantitative data to show that such indirect ties play a role in shaping support, we turn to in-depth analysis of interviews to investigate how support paths shape support rendered to entrepreneurs (Jack, 2010). We perform a within-case analysis of twenty-two support paths through QSA, Qualitative Structural Analysis (Herz et al., 2014), which is a reconstructive narrative analysis approach to social networks. This provides insight as to how indirect relationships (supporter and third party) interplay with direct relationships (supporter and entrepreneur). Then, through across-case analysis, we compared these accounts in their cognitive, structural, and relational dimensions. Theorizing these results, we suggest that supporting is not limited to exchanging and accessing resources, but rather involves the development of relationships that allow actors to frame and face ongoing challenges.

We reach beyond the notion of "strength" and provide a deeper view into how relationships are characterized, delving into the unique content and experience of these relationships (Ibarra et al., 2005; Jack, 2010). We first explore the support which is rendered, seeking nuance in characterizing supportive relational practices. Then, we examine the mechanisms along support

paths that enable these practices. Finally, we discuss the role of supporting in securing the supporter's position with regards to the entrepreneur, the third party, and the wider network. Our findings highlight that supporters' acts of support serve their own efforts to gain footholds in their own networks. In their development of relationships with the entrepreneur and the third party, they create a relational "shell" out of the support path that surrounds supporters with a safe relational space to stand within tensions they experience socially.

4.1 THEORY DEVELOPMENT

4.1.1 The relational underpinnings of support

Entrepreneurs' relationships are crucial for the survival of their endeavor (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). Relationships complement and enhance entrepreneurs' skills (Vissa and Chacar, 2009), determine the kinds of resources they receive (Kotha and George, 2012), and assist entrepreneurs in accessing vital new knowledge (Jack, 2005). Relationships set the tone, logic, and opportunities available at the unique position these actors occupy in the wider network (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Yet, we know little about the experience that supporters and entrepreneurs have within these relationships. Thus, while we know that relationships are important, understanding their operative mechanisms requires understanding supporters' experiences of these relationships.

Some extant research suggests that support paths are powerful enablers of entrepreneurial support relationships. Vanacker, Manigart, and Meuleman (2014) find that paths of relationships—the combination of direct and indirect ties linking one actor to another throughout a network—work as a "glue" that brings the network together, providing access to different "reservoirs" of support. Anderson, Park, and Jack (2007b) emphasize that this portfolio of contacts is the "key" for access to resources and draw attention to those around entrepreneurs who provide them with access to wider networks. However, if supporters are social agents just as much as any other participants in a network, their interests and efforts depend on their own networks. Thus, support

should depend on both direct and indirect ties, beyond the direct social influence of the entrepreneurs. We start from the assumption that such indirect relationships to third parties matter and explore the features of these direct and indirect supportive relationships, in a setting we refer to as a “support path”.

Drawing from their exploration of the nature of support received by entrepreneurs, Hanlon and Saunders (2007) argue that the interpersonal and emotional dimensions of support are critical to entrepreneurial relationships, given the unsettling, uncertain situations that are inherent to the entrepreneurial process (for example, Byrne & Shepherd, 2015; Mathias, Williams, & Smith, 2015; Shepherd, McMullen, & Jennings, 2007). These dimensions also intuitively follow from the observation that support, both in terms of tangible resources and more tacit forms such as advice-giving, often flows from already-existing relationships, where the relationship precedes supporting (Goss & Sadler-Smith, 2018; Huang & Knight, 2017).

Among these possible support forms are those that demand more nuanced motivational explanations beyond economic exchange; such forms include giving free advice, dispensing personal time to give emotional support, or volunteering resources that happen to be available for free. Beyond simple economic exchanges where the entrepreneur “purchases” support (for example, Leyden, Link, and Siegel, 2014; for a discussion, see Jones *et al.*, 1997), support emerges from the entrepreneur’s presentation, within existing relationships, of needs for support, paired with their contacts’ interest in responding to these needs (Goss & Sadler-Smith, 2018; Huang & Knight, 2017). In such cases, rather than the rendering of support being a matter of entrepreneurs’ efforts to build relationships for their own advantage, we begin with the assumption that existing relationships with and around supporters are mobilized to support entrepreneurs.

Taking the perspective of the supporter, we could ask why it would make sense within a given relationship to support an entrepreneur. The answer to this question may be shaped by supporters’ own social relationships, based on practices that secure agents’ social lives (Steyaert & van Looy, 2010). Such practices can be instrumental in nature, but are not necessarily so (Bouwen, 2010).

Instead of discussing how support is extracted from a network structure, we consider support as something emerging among relationships. From this perspective, we can understand how a supporter accepts to be in the entrepreneur's network in the first place, and why a particular supporter supports in a particular way.

4.1.2 The support path as a generative theoretical starting point

While we know a considerable amount about the benefits that entrepreneurs receive from their supporters (for example, Brüderl and Preisendörfer, 1998; Hanlon and Saunders, 2007; McKeever, Anderson, and Jack, 2014; Newbert and Tornikoski, 2013), less is known about how the supporters' own relationships enable and constrain the supporters in supporting entrepreneurs. We suggest that insight into the process of entrepreneurs' access to support can be gained by examining the aspects of relationships between entrepreneurs and their supporters alongside the latter's relationships with other contacts, who we refer to as "third parties". Support paths are conjunctions of direct and indirect ties connecting the third party to the entrepreneur through the supporter's mediation. We argue that the support received by an entrepreneur depends on the qualities of the entrepreneur's relationships to a supporter—a direct tie—in conjunction with the relationships the supporter has to a third party—an indirect tie. This path is illustrated in figure 3.1 in the previous chapter.

To fully describe these qualities, we follow Nahapiet and Sumantra's (1998) description of network ties in three dimensions: cognitive (shared values, languages, narratives), relational (the qualities of the tie), and structural (which actors are connected to each other). We begin with a premise of structural embeddedness, that is, how actors throughout a network are connected amongst themselves, both directly and indirectly (Jones et al., 1997). We complement this view by arguing that this structural embeddedness of the supporter in a support path precludes the practices that speak to the qualities of these dyadic relationships, that is, relational embeddedness. Our objective here is not to test whether relational or structural embeddedness have any effect (see Uzzi,

1996, 1997; Newbert et al., 2013), but rather to explore the relational mechanisms through which a support path, through the mediation of a supporter, translates into the support received by the entrepreneur. We take as a given that supporters and their supporting efforts are firmly rooted within the supporter's experience of their already existing own social world. To grasp this experience of the social world, we look into the cognitive dimension, that is, the experience of shared or complementary meanings that the supporter and entrepreneur articulate to navigate their respective situations. We briefly discuss these dimensions below, and how we suspect our shift towards supporters' perspectives will enhance our understanding of supporting efforts. In the results section, we first separately describe these dimensions to characterize the relational settings of the support paths we present. Subsequently, we discuss how these dimensions combine with each other to present a deep view of the ways meaningful relationships along support paths enable and constrain supporters in supporting entrepreneurs.

4.1.3 Describing the three dimensions of support paths

4.1.3.1 Cognitive dimension: similarities among actors

Homophily is the tendency for attraction among similar actors (McPherson, Smith-lovin, & Cook, 2001). While this might seem simple on the outset, in such categories as "same gender" or "same race", it can also pertain to similarity in other forms of experience. Homophily can also be taken to be similarity in articulation of meanings, such as value homophily (Ingram & Choi, 2017; Lazega, Mounier, Snijders, & Tubaro, 2012; McPherson et al., 2001). This is not so much a matter of having similar opinions, but rather that these actors feel that they navigate the same meanings on similar terms, relative to the wider network in which they are members. Such framing of close connections against a wider context can be beneficial. Interestingly, Burt (2019) noted that entrepreneurs are best served in the long run if, in initial stages, they "cocoon" themselves by seeking out densely connected relationships, emphasizing the safety and support found with similar others. Because the supporter is embedded between relationships which they experience to be

homophilous in some way, we expect to see that supporters provide support that emphasizes entrepreneurs' similarities to supporters' own relationships.

4.1.3.2 Relational dimension: tie strength and multiplexity

Following the classic definition by Granovetter (1973), the strength of a relationship is described, on the one hand, in the reciprocity of actions, the intensity, the sense of closeness, and the frequency—referred to as “relational embeddedness”. Extant literature on support has often looked to the strength or weakness of the relationships at hand (for example, Jack, Dodd, and Anderson, 2004; Newbert and Tornikoski, 2013). Increasing any of the relational dimensions can bring about interaction that toggles different sets of meanings (Mische & White, 1998), a mechanism that allows intimacy to grow between the actors in question (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998; Shah, Parker, & Waldstrøm, 2017). When different types of interaction, experienced as shifts between different domains of meanings, such as switching from work processes to family challenges, actors experience more than one type of tie, making the relationship multiplex (Hoang & Yi, 2015; Kuwabara et al., 2010). This has been shown to be indicative of the strength of the tie (Dahlander & McFarland, 2013; Marsden & Campbell, 1984). When observing only the direct ties around entrepreneurs, multiplexity has been shown to be mostly beneficial to obtaining support (Newbert & Tornikoski, 2012). While extant literature on support to entrepreneurs has explored the strength of ties across the entrepreneurs' portfolio of ties (Jack, 2005; Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013) we turn to the characteristics of the support path. The intuition here is that supporters would be more willing to support entrepreneurs with whom they are more strongly connected (Newbert et al., 2013), but we do not know why these relationships with the entrepreneurs make sense to the supporter, given the supporter's own meaningful relationships. We suspect that the relational embeddedness of the supporter and the entrepreneur speaks to the supporter's own relational embeddedness with other actors, thereby making their support efforts meaningful in how they relate with third parties. Likewise, the way in which supporters relate with third parties should also inspire

the way they navigate the different domains of meaning with the entrepreneur (and hence, switch between types of ties), and strengthen their relationship.

4.1.3.3 Structural approach: closure and brokerage

The assumption in social networks about the structure of relationships in a triad is that when there is closure, that is, when all three actors interact, they can monitor each other and tend towards greater synergy (Coleman, 1988). Conversely, this can be seen as a constraint on any given actor (Burt, 2004). However, if seen as an exchange of resources, if the entrepreneur has direct access to the third party, it could be expected that the supporter would be ignored, since there would be no need to go through the supporter's intermediation to obtain the resource (Obstfeld, 2005). However, we expect that even though an entrepreneur who is connected to both the third party and the supporter will obtain qualitatively different forms of support from both of these, which is contingent on the relational properties of these ties. The third party's conversations with the supporter would inform the supporter of the entrepreneur through a perspective that is outside of the supporter's relationship with the entrepreneur, enhancing, and maybe even constraining, their support efforts. Conversely, when a third party is not connected to an entrepreneur, the supporter would discuss more general issues of entrepreneurship, rather than the entrepreneur specifically, while obtaining information that is different from that which circulates within the entrepreneur's usual circle of relationships. While such discussions with the third party should be expected to inspire the supporter, the supporter should have less a sense of being constrained in supporting an entrepreneur because there are less chances of being monitored by the third party (Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013).

4.2 Data analysis

To understand how support reaches entrepreneurs in the form they receive it, we examine how support relationships mobilize diverse interactions that shape the efforts in supporting

entrepreneurs. In this paper, we use Qualitative Structural Analysis (QSA) (Herz et al., 2014), a reconstructive narrative analysis approach to social networks, to analyze interviews with pairs of entrepreneurs and their supporters. In this analysis, we first seek to characterize support in greater nuance than simply the provision of resources, thereby unpacking the richness of a support relationship. That is, following the framework put forth by Nahapiet and Sumantra (1998), we describe support paths in terms of cognitive, relational, and structural issues.

We would like to emphasize that, although the method here is predominantly inductive, it begins from the basic assumption that society is formed of a structure of relationships (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994), and that these structures enable and constrain actors' actions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Goss & Sadler-Smith, 2018). We also structure our analysis around the dimensions established by Nahapiet and Sumantra (1998), described above. This clarity is key to the specific form of narrative analysis which we employ here, QSA (Herz et al., 2014), which is geared towards unpacking the experience of network structures. As previously described, we inquire about a specific structure, the support path, which comes imbued with expectations about the qualities of these relationships but has yet to explore how supporters' positions enable and constrain their support efforts. Hence, this is not an effort in grounded theory, but rather an effort towards extending firmly established network theory by delving into the mechanisms of a particular structure of relationships, that is, the support path. Our choice to use phenomenological method is a departure from the usual questionnaire-based analyses to discuss entrepreneurs' support networks (for example, Brüderl and Preisendörfer, 1998; Hanlon and Saunders, 2007; Newbert et al., 2013) and follows Ibarra et al.'s (2005) and Jack's (2010) challenge to observe networks from within the experience of the actors in order to complement extant theories regarding the overall measures of the network.

4.2.1 Apprehending meaning

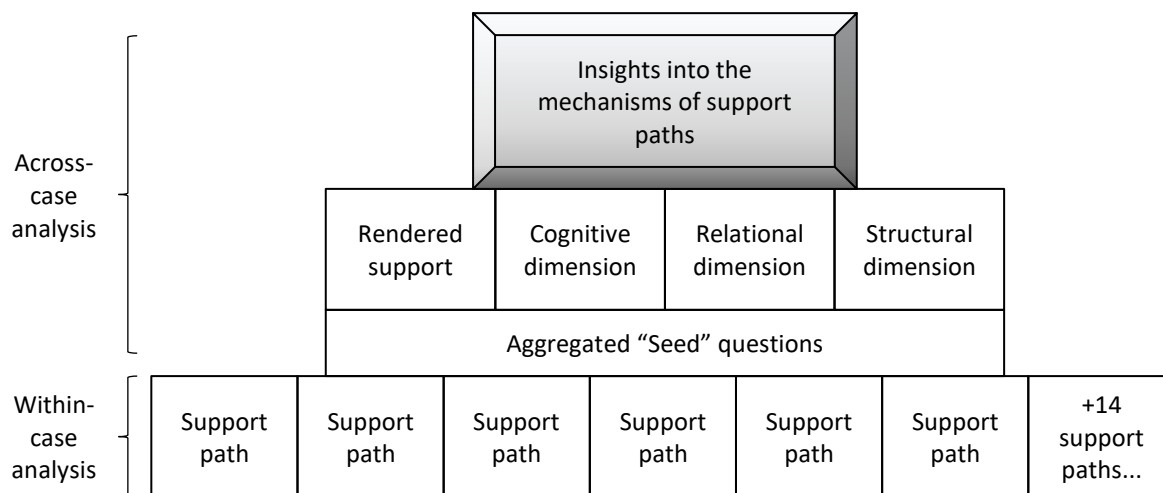
We first observe entrepreneurs' experience of receiving support and the supporter's experience in supporting through within-case analyses, with particular attention towards the relationships within which this support plays out. Here, our method is particularly useful in drawing light to two elements that would be opaque if we simply remained within one or the other interview: the entrepreneur provides insight into the meaning of the support rendered, and the supporter provides insight into the relational matters that are only indirectly connected to the entrepreneur. Subsequently, we compare the support paths in the cognitive, relational, and structural dimensions, in an across-case analysis. Finally, we aggregate these dimensions to find insights into the mechanisms that play out in the support path. This strategy is illustrated in Figure 2 below and described in detail subsequently.

4.2.2 Within-case analysis

Following QSA methodology (Herz et al., 2014), first, the interviews with the entrepreneur were scanned for references to the supporter and, when present, the third parties described in the interview with the supporter. From these accounts, attention was given to the description of support received and the experience of their relationship. Here, the issue is to both find concrete outcomes that qualify the support received, as well as clues to how the supporter positions his/herself in the relationship.

Instead of working with specific quotes as units of analysis, QSA looks at the information at hand in the interviews as the interviewees present their stories. At this stage we generate "seed" questions from these accounts that should be able to be answered in both the interviews with the entrepreneur and the supporter, for example, "this entrepreneur says that good advice comes from his friend because he is a journalist—why is a journalism a good source of entrepreneurship advice?" We provide an illustrative example of the method of analysis in Appendix A.

Figure 4.1 – Strategy for data analysis



First, we compare the account of support given with that given by the entrepreneur. We first did this based solely on the transcriptions of the interviews, but found that this was misleading, as we were looking for the significance of the elements within the narrative and the written text lacked the full affective markers in speech (Quinn & Dutton, 2005). Therefore, when approaching the interviews, they were always accompanied with the recording, taking cues from the way things were said, rather than just the words that were said, to understand the links interviewees made among the key elements of their narratives. Rather than taking the words or sentences as units of analysis, the search was for themes and narrative elements that interviewees articulated. This resulted in a poignant point of view imposed on the analysis by forcing the analyst to keep up with the interviewee's enunciations in the recordings. Notes were taken to paraphrase and summarize the narratives, hereby bringing to the forefront the links between the elements in an interpretative approach to their meaning, that is, how they are associated to other elements and to the general narrative of the interview (Hosking, 2010). We looked into themes that the supporter emphasizes, either by placing strong intonation while making a point, or by frequently returning to that issue. We assume that these themes are related to the support that is given and should answer some of the unique questions generated in the first step to approach the narratives that the interviewees develop. Then, we looked into the accounts of the supporter's relationships with third parties, paying attention to how these themes appear in his/her experience. We compared the routines, types of

conversations, and governance of switching between types of conversations (for example, switching between work-related discussion and personal issues) (Mische & White, 1998) that the supporter experiences, guided by the questions generated before.

While we assume that the entrepreneur is able to relate the experience of being supported by the supporter, he/she has at best an imperfect view of their supporter's experience in the position he/she occupies in the support path. Likewise, we assume that the supporter is able to describe his/her experience in the support path but does not fully understand the full meaning of the support to the entrepreneur. Therefore, in the final step of the within-case analysis, we reverse the sequence of the analysis: describing it from the supporter's experience with the third party back to his/her experience with the entrepreneur, and finally the entrepreneur's experience of being supported, looking for ways in which the indirect tie constrains or enables the supporter in providing the support that is received. We write up the story of the support, situating it within the themes of the relationships and how these are all interrelated. At this point, striking themes come to the foreground, which provide the basis of the theoretical discussion of the structure about which we inquire, that is, the support path.

4.2.3 Across-case analysis

The assumption we develop throughout the present study is that interactions held within relationships direct supportive behavior towards the entrepreneur. Therefore, we look for constraints and enabling mechanisms that are associated with the support that is given. We look for similarities and contrasts among the twenty-two support paths in terms of a) the support efforts, b) the guiding principles that enable and constrain the support, and c) the function which the support plays in developing the relationships at hand around the supporter.

Point "a)", characterizing the support, is obtained simply by comparing the accounts of support received across the support paths, aggregating them in their similarity and looking for nuances which set them apart. To find "b)" and pinpoint guiding principles that enable and constrain

support efforts, we begin with the “seed” questions that we had generated previously in the within-case analysis. These “seed” questions were derived from the links made between the elements of the narrative, that is, the meanings articulated in the relationship, and lead to more intricate understanding in the within-case analysis, and therefore are indicative of archetypical logics in support paths. The accounts associated with each of these questions can then be analyzed to provide a theoretical answer regarding the micro-processes within triads where support happens, characterizing support paths in the three dimensions of network analysis (cognitive, relational, and structural) (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Finally, for point “c”, where we establish the function of support in supporters’ relationships, we pay attention to the plot of the full story developed regarding the full support path in the final stage of the within-case analysis. First, we make these comparisons in terms of the dimensions of networks established by Nahapiet and Sumantra (1998). Then, we combine insights from these three dimensions to obtain a deep view of how relational paths constrain and enable the supporter in supporting. This is mostly illustrated and discussed in light of the three illustrative support paths, although passing reference is made to other support paths, inasmuch as these informed the insights in ways that these three support paths do not reflect. However, in the interest of clarity, in presenting the argument we refer to the three illustrative support paths as much as possible.

4.3 RESULTS

4.3.1 Within-case analysis

In this section, we present three illustrative support paths that reveal how indirect relationships interact with direct relationships in forming the interaction where support occurs. These are selected for illustrative purposes because they present clear variations on the cognitive, relational, and structural dimensions described above. These support paths are quite didactic in revealing the importance of looking at relationships as space where meaning is discussed (Hjorth, 2007; Lee and Martin, 2018; Steyaert and van Looy, 2010).

Due to the depth of the interpretation at hand, which is quite different from thematic coding, interrater reliability is not feasible for verifying validity. Rather, discussion of interpretive efforts are the appropriate means to deepen these interpretations (Zhao, Li, Ross, & Dennis, 2016). The narratives for the within-case analyses were interpreted and reconstructed by the first author, who also conducted all the interviews. The method for analysis was discussed and refined in two methods research forums (one focused on management and strategy, the other on qualitative methods in social network analysis). Further input came from the other two authors, verifying if these reconstructions were acceptable. Rather than seek to cancel out the effect of the researcher in the analysis, we acknowledge, and even rely on, researchers' unique roles in shaping the insights through their own ability to listen attentively (Bernhard, 2018; Cope, 2005a).

4.3.1.1 “Alliance”, where the entrepreneur can do what the third party can only dream of (Illustrative support path 1)

In this support path, the entrepreneur and his wife have set up a hostel in a central area of town. The entrepreneur described how his close friend, a journalist, is able to provide key insights that evaluate the viability of the entrepreneurs' ideas through difficult, critical questions (referred to by both the entrepreneur and the supporter as playing “devil's advocate”), while also introducing some information which the entrepreneur can consider when creating new actions.

“Yeah, well, he is a friend to me. Well. Here's the thing, since I know he'll give an opinion that is very... an opinion that is important, you know, relevant, so... he is a guy who I know I can ask things to and he will say something I won't like to hear. But I know that I... He sometimes plays devil's advocate, you know, sometimes I ask him a question to know what he thinks about it, that I know... He is the guy who can tell me that the idea is horrible, the business, the idea is really bad.”

Alliance, entrepreneur

From these provocations, the entrepreneur can reach out to his own network and discuss the matters with direct searches for solutions and new information, which he relays back to the supporter to follow up on the questions raised previously.

Outside of this direct relationship with the entrepreneur, the supporter has a relationship with a co-worker at a leading media firm, who is much more experienced than he and with whom he half-playfully explores alternative career paths as entrepreneurs...

“We’re always talking about something we could do, and then we never put it in practice, we are challenged and frustrated at the same time, because it’s a thing we would always like to do, that we always talk about and exchange thoughts on, but it never gets off the paper. But, like, it’s challenging because when you are working in a place and talking to people about the work day, and it’s very flat, every conversation, every subject, and meeting Lucas is like getting on a roller coaster, it’s turning your head topsy-turvy, ‘why not? Let’s do this, let’s do that, whatever, la, la, la’, and then in the end it doesn’t get off the paper. But it’s challenging that way, we go crazy, you know, having ideas, going crazy on our ideas and such, but they don’t, not always, uh, go forward, they don’t always progress, you know.”

Alliance, supporter

...if they would ever have the courage to leave their safe jobs.

“There is an uncertainty in our profession and that, for us who are in a stable job, it’s very hard to throw everything to the sky and try something new, you follow? No matter how much we believe in what we are doing, we also have bills to pay. So we have ideas that are really good from our point of view, but then that uncertainty hits us, ‘damn, but will it work? Will it be profitable? Could we live off it? And when that doubt hits, we hit the brake and end up not doing it. I think that’s the main problem, actually, getting really excited, and then frustrated right after that. [...] I think it’s the opposite of what João is doing, which is not being afraid of throwing it all to the sky and all that to invest in something new.”

Alliance, supporter

Reading this “downstream” along the support path, from the third party to the entrepreneur, we can see a pattern emerge. What follows is our interpretive reflection on these patterns, where we tease out the themes that “ripple” down the relationships and culminate in supportive actions.

Our reflection on the support path: With the third party, an intense friendship is open to expose problems and critique solutions. These problems they discuss are mostly work-related, though personal and trivial topics are possible. They explore entrepreneurship options as a means towards emancipation from their current frustrations with their field. Conversations are formed by investigative critique from journalistic background and managerial experience. The critique foments a compelling discussion, but also justifies their reticence to act. The Devil’s Advocate is “the devil”. The entrepreneur, however, is the realization of this failed, frustrated conversation. The supporter brings this talk, which for the supporter is ordinary, compelling, and gives the entrepreneur something which for the entrepreneur is invaluable, namely, critique, Devil’s Advocate advice. The supporter’s notion of friendship is beyond the entrepreneur’s notion of friendship. This background adds on to the supporter and entrepreneur’s habitual conversation, which is a reciprocal show of care through Devil’s Advocate critique, while transitioning among banter that strengthens an experience of shared worldview, interests, and past experiences. In the same way, this critique

and emancipation with the entrepreneur resonates with the tie between the supporter and third party's critical discussion, experienced on both sides as "craziness" (as opposed to frustration). The entrepreneur adds onto these provocations by doing the homework, getting knowledge from his own network.

This demonstrates how an indirect tie can "warm up" the supporter to interact in knowledge-building routines with the entrepreneur when providing space to explore entrepreneurial ideas critically and by providing a space to fantasize about the "romance" of entrepreneurship. We also see that the entrepreneur captures the knowledge by responding with reciprocal critique of supporter's situations by searching her network for responses to Devil's Advocate critique and by embedding these conversations in a range of shared interests.

4.3.1.2 "Chord-B", where modus operandi is laid out before the entrepreneur is in the scene (Illustrative support path 2)

The supporter, Teresinha, has a friendship with a teacher at the professional development school (the third person) who pushed her to look into the human impact of the products they designed when she was in high school.

"He is very different from the other teachers at that school. [...] He would go beyond, would make us question the things we were making. 'Hey, so you're creating a piece of equipment. Cool. But what will this piece of equipment do to... to... to bring more mobility, to improve people's lives? What will this piece of equipment create that will be innovative? Let's not just create a piece of equipment, let's see what is the real meaning of creating this thing here.' [...] And he was a person who was always seeking to help, and saying, 'I'm going to find an opportunity', like, 'this link will lead you to taking this course', 'take this course and you will meet so-and-so', or 'you will develop such-and-such a mindset', or 'you will specialize in this.'"

Chord-B, supporter

When she showed inquisitiveness, he answered her questions and guided her, always pushing for the impact on people. She experienced this as care on his part, interest in her development and helped her to enter into her career. With time, he opened up his personal life, and she opened up hers, where care now is a mixture of listening to each other and directing product development towards human impact. This transition validated her position in this world of product development, innovation.

“There was a time I said, ‘wow, I can really trust in him, because he talked with me about a personal issue, from his family. [...] I said, ‘wow, the guy is trusting this in me, like a student, you know, who can talk, he talked about relationships with me, with a student who is fifteen’, at the time, you follow?”

Chord-B, supporter

She took this preoccupation around meaningful design into her new job, where she interns for a startup at a co-working space, which neighbors the entrepreneur’s startup. Here, she saw the entrepreneur posting thoughtful, provocative, statements about the meaning of their work. She approached him and asked questions about the human impact of running a startup.

“There was the happy hour in December, end of December, and that was when I asked him, ‘what is more important in a startup, having a mission or making money? That was when we started having a much cooler relationship, like, putting forth these thoughts. [...] We talk more about impact, what is my product generating in terms of impact? What is my product generating for people? Our conversations revolve around this. And books, what books can help. [...] His father-in-law said he wanted to start a startup, so we thought about what material would be good for him to read.”

Chord-B, supporter

This began a series of interactions where they share a passion for entrepreneurship that generates benefits for users beyond making money. The entrepreneur sees this as a matter of the supporter’s own disposition, while her story with the third party who nurtured and shaped her inquisitiveness remains opaque, perhaps unknown, to him.

“I get along well with people who are intelligent and interested, like, I have a cool magnetism with people who like to read and like to make it happen, and Teresinha, right off the bat she just, she, she sat at the table by me, at the time [...] and for the talk, just like that, there, you see, you could see that she was really excited.”

Chord-B, entrepreneur

This passion they share is enough to make the relationship intense, yet bound within the theme of entrepreneurship. The entrepreneur requests information, and she gladly researches for the answer. She requests guidance, clarity, on the values and processes of entrepreneurship, and he responds because of his passion for the theme.

Their relationship is one of care, now confined to one single, work-related, theme. He does not experience this as friendship but does appreciate her care for him in providing useful information.

“I think there’s a... this, a thing of talking, even about, like, something in common, what you like, what you really like so on and so forth, it feels more like a friendship, yeah, I think, I think this is the spirit of startups, of innovation, I think this fits well, so on and so forth, dang, innovation, seeing what’s going on, man, sharing, learning from mistakes, this is called... ah, this is called ‘caring for your neighbor’, really helping, you know, this for me is... this is, I can ask for an investment, which will be a real help, but a person that takes initiative to, to bring me something, I think it helps a lot, you know, like, yeah.”

Chord-B, entrepreneur

She experiences a quote-unquote “friendship”, similar to the guidance from teacher, but sans personal issues.

“Ah, that’s a professional friendship, well, I don’t know what to say, but it’s a very strong professional friendship, like, we never got around to talking about personal things, like, but it’s more about development.”

Chord-B, supporter

And so, to summarize the support path:

Our reflections on the support path: Teresinha, with the third party, her high-school teacher, was inducted into a world of meaningful product design, where products are only truly meaningful when they are humane. Her constant, inquisitive nature was nurtured by this professor. At a moment of personal stress, the professor reached beyond his own professional role and treated her as a human being, opening their relationship to a personal, human experience. At this moment, she saw that she could be more than just a young student, and had something to offer through her humanity to this professional world. This set the stage for future interactions. When she started working at the co-working space, she pursued this interest in the human dimension of product development. In conversations with the founder of a neighboring startup, the human dimension thrived: they constantly question the meaningfulness of what they do, and relentlessly, passionately pursue means to cultivate this view towards strategy. The entrepreneur connects to her passion and requests her to search for more opportunities to generate impact for his business.

We see here that an indirect tie that is both work-related and capable of becoming friendship-related validates the supporter’s position as an actor with contributions to the wider network. The supporter’s tie to a third party can imbue them with a repertoire to initiate interactions with likeminded entrepreneurs. Support is received when passion for a theme generated in the indirect tie is captured, harnessed, in the direct tie.

4.3.1.3 “Light”, a triad against the world (Illustrative support path 3)

The supporter and entrepreneur in the support path “Light” were work colleagues in executive positions in a corporation before they branched off into life as entrepreneurs. The reciprocity between them is quite high, to the point that in the interview with the entrepreneur it is quite blurry who gives whom advice about what—both seem to have input to give on the same challenges. Both praise the high sense of partnership they enjoy in their relationship. The entrepreneur feels that the supporter understands the purpose of his project, the mission that he has to meet a specific need in society, which is much beyond the economics of meeting the financial “bottom line”. Problems are faced head on by both, with “sincere feedback” given whenever needed. This is felt as an overall “positive spirit”, which is a mindset that expects the best opportunities to present themselves in the midst of real difficulties and challenges that have to be faced.

“It’s great to know what’s wrong, especially in Brazil, where it’s rare for someone to have the sincerity to come to your presentation and say, ‘dude, your presentation is horrible’. So we have this care to be very frank with each other, we don’t get anything from trying to praise, [in a sarcastic tone] ‘wow, that’s cool!’, when it’s not good at all. There are people who are important like that, where you have sincerity, this open channel.”

Light, entrepreneur

The entrepreneur is wary of a certain level of mysticism (in the supporter’s words, “people look at me and think, ‘she’s so optimistic, she must believe in Santa Claus!’”) which he feels that the supporter brings to her advice, which stems from a tension between her religious practice and his skeptical positivism, but the end product of her discussions of the challenges they face, alongside her focus on caring for a purpose-driven endeavor, gives him reason to overcome this wariness.

“I’m completely skeptical when it comes to religion, which is actually just physics, and with Sandra it’s funny because Sandra is completely religious, and still, there’s no problem. And, but I believe that when you focus on the positive, there is nothing mystical that the thing will have a higher probability of coming about. It’s just a matter of... when you are... human

beings are really good at recognizing patterns, and you highlight the pattern that interests you. [...] What I like about Sandra is that she also has this focus on the positive. So it's a joyful conversation, it's an inspiring conversation, 'dude, is there a problem? Yes, there is. How do we solve it? How do we get past this? The vibe is really cool that way.'

Light, entrepreneur

He embraces the knowledge she brings, even turning it into a mindset that he can explain in sufficiently positivist terms, and that generates an opportunism that he finds productive on his part for spotting growth and improvement opportunities.

"And this exchange, from my part, is more analytical. I like to go in, to do the math, and so on, 'gee, Sandra, get these scenarios, think it through this way, in your company', so this exchange is cool."

Light, entrepreneur

Similar to this reciprocation through skillful support efforts between the entrepreneur and the supporter, the third party is a lawyer who does not charge for her legal advice to the supporter for her own business. Focus is on being good professionals, skillful. Networks effects are expected, as goodwill circulates (in the supporter's words, "life pays you back"). This relationship is distinct from those with most people, in the supporter's eyes, because most are looking for some sort of advantage, and are envious, unsupportive, and the process of being an entrepreneur is a most solitary one, citing numerous examples of times when people started to give her some sort of support, but then would lead the conversation towards instrumental, monetary, exchanges. The third party, on the other hand gives the supporter personal care, "almost a sister", as the supporter describes it. Her questions lead to the meaning of what the supporter is doing, above the matter of profits. Questions build her focus on the essence of the business, not just planning (goal setting) and profits.

The supporter is unclear whether the entrepreneur is truly focused on his strategy. She says he is of the "Harvard, planning, school", but also lacks a strong personal sense of focus that can keep him safe from being pulled into several directions by the interest of people who want a piece of his company. Her suspicion of people is generalized. However, the third party is trustworthy; she is one of the few people who actually extend self-less, excellence-based, help, with whom she

can build focus. The entrepreneur is one more person who gains her trust from their original interaction and sustained back and forth conversation.

In these conversations, the third party addresses real problems head on. Because this leads to solving problems, instead of comfortably ignoring them, the supporter says that it is positive. It moves towards solutions. This is different from those who hide the problems, who boycott efforts; generally, she feels that everyone has envy and hopes to see entrepreneurs, such as herself, fail.

However, the entrepreneur seems to be at risk of losing his focus and drifting into the “American school” of thought. She is concerned that what he is getting into will fail to explore the full meaning of doing business. The questions the supporter asks are also there to raise this doubt and keep the entrepreneur focused because she feels that he is too trusting, too optimistic.

“I’m more suspicious of things. I worry if it’s trustworthy. I see big companies with interest in his project, with big IT teams. But I don’t really know that field. [...] He sees what is best in situations, what’s best in people, in relationships. But this comes with a bit of naïveté on his part, so I think he is slow to see some things in situations. So in sales I think he should have a bit more awareness. So our conversations are always, my relationship with Almeida [the entrepreneur] is of a lot of exchanges, how we live each moment, he always has a vision... of my business and I always try to bring this balance of making him peak behind the door.”

Light, supporter

This provides support that the entrepreneur had characterized as “positive”, that is, directs towards a positive mindset while overcoming real problems, and helps the entrepreneur to remain driven in the purpose for his endeavor.

Our reflection on the support path: The third party does not charge for her legal advice. Focus is on being good professionals, skillful. Networks effects are expected, as goodwill circulates. This is distinct from most people because most are looking for some sort of advantage, and are envious, unsupportive, and the process of being an entrepreneur is a most solitary one. Personal care is given as an older sister. Her questions lead to the meaning of what the supporter is doing, above the matter of profits. The supporter is unclear whether the entrepreneur is focused. She says he is of the Harvard, planning, school, but also lacks a strong personal sense of focus that can keep him safe from being pulled into several directions from the interest of people who want a piece of his company. Her suspicion of people is generalized. But the third party is trustworthy, she is one of the few people who actually extend self-less, excellence-based, help, with whom she can build focus. The entrepreneur is one more person who gains her trust from their original interaction and sustained back and forth conversation. In these conversations, the supporter addresses real problems head on. Because this leads to solving problems, instead of comfortably ignoring them, it is positive. Moves towards solutions. This is different from those who hide the problems, boycott efforts,

everyone has envy and hopes to see you fail, as both the entrepreneur and the supporter express—and both are worried that the other is too naïve. The supporter seems to be at risk of losing his focus and drifting into the “American school”, losing sight of working towards a vision, in favor of profit-driven instrumentalization. She is concerned about what he is getting into, that it will fail to explore the full meaning of doing business. Her questions also are there to raise this doubt and keep him focused.

This support path is an example of how the support path is embedded within the experience of a wider network. Given the pressures experienced in a social world, an actor can surround him or herself with what are felt to be likeminded people. Supporting can be a means to strengthen these ties to likeminded people, not just to keep the ties alive, but to enact these very similarities that are in stark contrast to what they experience to be a hostile world.

4.3.2 Cross-case analysis

Here, we compare the illustrative support paths above to build insights about the relationality of support, following the dimensions of network analysis established by Nahapiet and Sumantra (1998). First, we discuss each dimension separately, namely the cognitive, relational, and structural. Then, we aggregate these insights to provide deep understanding of the meaningful relationships that constrain and enable support efforts to entrepreneurs.

4.3.2.1 Cognitive dimension: similarities among actors

Value heterophily (Ingram & Choi, 2017; Lazega et al., 2012) proved to be an important mechanism that drives conversations around matters that are felt to be problematic, thereby generating a sense that all actors along the support path have formed some sort of coalition against a world that does not enjoy these same values. These then form a sense of resistance against such forces as excessive pragmatism (support path 3) and dispassionate functionalism (support path 2). Here, support comes in the form of alliance, an affirmation that no one in the path is alone in their strife to make decisions against a given *status quo*. As such, it frames the problems faced by the actors along the support path in certain terms, rendering consideration of some possible actions

more desirable than others. Conversely, these discussions against the *status quo* secure the vitality of the relationships at hand, since, in the effort to stay true to their personal values in the face of alternative values (consider the entrepreneur in support path 3 who the supporter feels is at risk of “losing his focus”), these actors turn to each other to discuss their current challenges.

Another form of homophily seems to appear among these support paths: that of sharing similar situations, a “situational homophily”. Support path 1 presents the clearest form of such a form of homophily, and it is also a main driver for the direct tie in support path 3. In support path 1 specifically, the supporter and the third party share frustrations with their profession, which motivates their conversations about entrepreneurial opportunities. The entrepreneur fits well when considering the homophily in their situations, but with one important difference: he, too, felt the pressures of his frustrating profession (the same as the supporter and third party’s), but without a steady, well-paid corporate job, he was less inclined to hold tight to his original profession and embarked on the emancipatory path of entrepreneurship. The fact that he shares the situation, that is, is situationally homophilous, to the supporter and third party, all the more binds all three actors in conversations where the need for the supporter’s critique emerges. In support path 3, the support that emerges from this situational homophily is quite straightforward: because they face similar challenges, in similar industries, at times with the same people, similar solutions are to be expected. Simply put, these findings suggest that experienced situational homophily binds the actors together in ways that emphasize their challenges within and against the wider network.

4.3.2.2 Structural dimension: closure and brokerage

In all three support paths described above, there is no indication that there is any interaction between the entrepreneurs and the third parties. These show that supporting is not so much a matter of securing and exchanging resources through social pressure, where access comes at a lower price due to some form of social constraint (Newbert & Tornikoski, 2013). Rather, there is something unique to the relationships that, in their configuration around the supporter, must form a support

path that has a direct and an indirect tie. The supporter, rather than simply passing along a resource obtained in a “pocket” of the network that is out of reach to the entrepreneur, has experiences that are specific to their own relationship with the third party, a relationship that has a history and a language of its own. For example, the supporter in support path 3 says of her third party that she is like a “big sister”, where the free legal advice she gives, and the problem-focused discussions she promotes, come within the context of going to birthday parties and other informal outings, where they discuss such personal matters as their marriages and children, alongside their careers and business decisions. While the third party could easily provide free legal advice to the entrepreneur (and there is no real reason not to), this would not reach the heart of the discussions that are had along the support path, namely, that the entrepreneur and supporter have their own history and situations within their industry where they cultivate what they call a “positive attitude”, simultaneous to the “positive attitude” developed in the relationship between the supporter and the third party that anticipates problems and searches for opportunities in a different context. It is not about the free legal advice, but about a creative, constant aspiration to cultivate a certain attitude towards challenges in entrepreneurship. As such, these relationships can remain in the form of “forbidden triads”, where the supporter has two strong ties to the entrepreneur and third party without introducing these actors to each other—the possible relationship between the entrepreneur and the third party would simply not thrive in the same way that makes the support emerge as it currently does in this path. While extant theory suggests that entrepreneurs should make efforts to embed new supporters in their support network, this does not seem to be the case for supporters: their effort is responding to the entrepreneur’s needs by using the best of their skills and knowledge that has, in part, been developed, and precluded, relationally.

4.3.2.3 Relational dimension: tie strength and multiplexity

Some supporters can feel that their opinions do not matter (Kim et al., 2013), such as in support path 2, where the supporter is quite the junior to the entrepreneur. By interacting across

several types of conversation with their third parties, supporters can experiment with articulating their views, gain knowledge, and simply discover that they are able to be associated with third parties (Anderson et al., 2007). This is analogous to the intimacy-building dynamics Rawhouser, Villanueva, and Newbert (2017) observed in entrepreneurs' interactions with supporters, now applied to the supporter's efforts to secure resources with third parties. The outlook of the supporter's connections changes. Some supporters were initiated in the "new" domain of "entrepreneurship" with the third party, while others were validated as part of the social circle of "entrepreneurship" when building intimacy with a third party (Galeotti & Goyal, 2010; Uzzi & Lancaster, 2003). This point is different from simply transmitting knowledge. Rather, it speaks to the value of the knowledge the supporter has. While it has been shown that the recipient of the advice should recognize the value of the advice to seek it out and receive it (Cross et al., 2001), the supporter should also value the advice enough to risk giving it out.

Recall that (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007: 602) emphasized that the supporter "willingly" gives access to resources. We see, now, that this can happen in two ways. In one, the entrepreneur knows that the supporter is associated with third parties who can give good advice (even if they do not know who these third parties are) and request advice due to this association, as illustrated in support path 2. In the other, the supporter knows that the third parties have valued their relationship within the context of entrepreneurship in some way, and have endowed with this confidence the supporter embraces the conversation with the entrepreneur and gives their best shot at supporting, as illustrated in support path 1.

4.3.3 Characterizing support paths

We set out to explore the relational underpinnings for the rendition of support to entrepreneurs, starting from the assumption that relationships both enable and constrain as they position actors within a structured network of relationships (Anderson & Miller, 2003; Hite, 2005; Hite & Hesterly, 2001; Jack & Anderson, 2002; Larson, 1992; McKeever, Jack, & Anderson, 2015).

In this section, we begin by discussing the insights obtained from the above analysis in regard to the cognitive, relational, and structural dimensions of social network analysis. This is followed by a discussion of the meanings of these relational practices within and against other relationships the supporters experience. While this section is considerably detailed, it serves to fully characterize the structure we seek to describe, namely, the support path. The underlying mechanisms are discussed in the subsequent section, abstracting from the detailed insights obtained here. This section also presents elements from other cases in the sample, including those where supporters refrained from rendering support, which leads to further insights into the mechanisms at hand in support paths.

4.3.3.1 The support efforts

Several different forms of support can be seen in these three illustrative support paths. While some of them resound with the current literature (see, for example, Reynolds, 2001), such as connection to other people, emotional support, and idea-generating conversation, other forms are less obvious, such as the provision of reading material, volunteering to gather information, and communicating their own presence in an otherwise solitary situation. Most interesting is the content of the support that the interviewees describe, which provides nuance regarding the support received that is not captured in questionnaire forms traditionally used in studies of supporters (for example, Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Newbert et al., 2013).

For example, while “idea generation” can suggest that there is a fruitful discussion with supporters which might, or might not, be based on the supporter’s explicit knowledge-sharing efforts, the support described here focuses more on the fact that these conversations happen.

“So sometimes he asks about things and I put his question into my framework to find a solution. But when he starts to talk he goes, ‘no, but I don’t want to know’, and the question seems to have been rhetorical, to himself, you know? It was to blow off steam. But he’s a really smart guy, anyway. [...] It’s like he’s asking for help, but when I start to talk, I don’t know if he’s worn out from the subject, I don’t know why, but he switches off. ‘Oh, no, let’s change the subject.’ But sometimes the subject catches on and we can get into it.”

Ice, supporter

It is not the knowledge which supporters bring and impart that is valuable, but rather the knowledge that is provoked through questions (for example, “devil’s advocate advice”), provision of space to speak, or even the mindset that is generated through the discussion which helps the entrepreneur to remain focused when making decisions. A supporter that has very little to offer can enhance the entrepreneur’s position by allowing the entrepreneur to guide the supporter in their growth, thereby giving the entrepreneur space to explore their own thoughts.

Other forms of support that were described to be particularly helpful were those that enhanced affinity between the entrepreneur and the supporter.

He’s always helping, so it’s easier to open up to someone who is always helping. But especially his demeanor, more easygoing... [...] We have goals, of course, we’re in a rush, we have to show results to the investors, and so on. And LM isn’t like that, he’s here to help, and it’s a really good relationship, being with him. The fact of having him here is really cool. Today I don’t consider myself his friend, because we haven’t done anything outside of here, yet, but he’s a guy I would like to develop a greater friendship with, I think he’s an interesting guy. [...] It’s a helping relationship.

Chord-A, entrepreneur

Here, the value of signaling affinity lies in its stark contrast to a practice which is felt to be essentially solitary, or even in opposition to a status quo. Such signaling of affiliation can come from exploring the similar situations faced by both the entrepreneur and the supporter within the entrepreneurship process, as well as by exploring shared passion (such as a particular paradigm for entrepreneurship) or even the shared stories from their past, or their personal interests.

4.3.3.2 The relational mechanisms that enable and constrain the support

The supporters in these support paths experienced forms of entrepreneurship alongside the third parties that shaped what is, and what is not, valid forms of entrepreneurship. This is then extended to their relationships with the entrepreneurs, often functioning as guiding principles which encapsulate how their interactions progress. For both illustrative support paths 2 and 3, this comes in the form of a purpose-driven entrepreneurship, and for support path 1 (and of secondary importance in support path 3, where it takes a cautionary form), it is in the form of entrepreneurship

as emancipation from a corporate career. These interactions with the third party provide the supporter with a lexicon that they can articulate together with the entrepreneur, as especially emphasized in illustrative support path 2.

The development of a relationship with the third party also helps the supporter gain a foothold as participants in the entrepreneurial network. In support path 1, the supporter is a spectator; in support path 2, the supporter works in a startup and engages in several discussions; and in support path 3, the supporter is an initiating entrepreneur. Third parties induct these supporters simply by engaging them in their own concerns around entrepreneurship. In support path 2, this concern is directed towards training her to think about design in a specific manner which serves his personal agenda to train young professionals. In support path 1, this concern is in regard to the third party's mild irritancies with his current job, where he finds an outlet for fantasizing about a change in career. In support path 3, this concern is an application of the third party's professional skills to the supporter's own challenges, working as a competent professional who treats her profession as a calling that places her in a role in society. The footholds supporters gain, as they transition out of these conversations, is a more potent, energized position as a person who is firmly positioned in the network. The supporter in support path 2 has a framework through which she can find other likeminded entrepreneurs to continue this form of entrepreneurship. The supporter in support path 1 becomes a skilled critic of entrepreneurial decisions. The supporter in support path 3 strengthens her own approach to giving and receiving support by optimistically approaching and foreseeing difficult problems in order to pursue focused opportunities. Even seasoned supporters are strengthened by supporting entrepreneurs. In the following story, the supporter, who is a much older entrepreneur, supporting the entrepreneur financially and strengthening his local community, which organizes consumers of a particular hobby industry, and consequently strengthened his position as a mobilizer.

“We have our own hobby group here in my town, so we had Genes over to give a workshop, and that was great because we brought him [the entrepreneur] in. But when I told

him to come over, he didn't have adequate financial conditions to travel, so I said, 'don't worry, I'll pay for gasoline and tolls and you come over'."

Genes, supporter

The simple fact that these relationships with third parties are there for the supporters also has an effect in prompting the provision of support. The supporter in support path 3 has found in the third party one more ally in an otherwise untrustworthy, overly pragmatic system—a system to which she is worried the entrepreneur will fall prey. For the supporter in support path 2, when the third party extended their conversations into personal issues, such as her support regarding his failed marriage and his counselling her on her relationships with parents, her position in the entrepreneurial network as a full colleague became validated and she was able to pursue a position in the co-working space where she found the entrepreneur. For the supporter in support path 1, he has a mentor who has guided his professional decisions, taking care of his trajectory within the corporation where they work, while harnessing and defusing any frustrations along the way, proving to be someone with whom it is worthwhile to have conversations, an attitude he emulates to the entrepreneur.

4.3.3.3 Supporters situating their relationship with the entrepreneur in their social context

Each supporter described their relationship to their social context as a general sensation of how things work, a sense of the “rules of the game” which they were navigating and produced in them strong emotional and affective reactions. For the supporters in support paths 1 and 3, this situation was less than comfortable, de-energizing at times. For the supporter in support path 3, this context was often antagonistic and ambiguous, laden with threats of being undermined due to a value system that was egoistic. For the supporter in support path 1, this is a general sense that the industry in which they started their careers is not the idealistic force that they set out to contribute to and requires at least a certain amount of compromise of their own personal ideals and sense of

quality work to be delivered. However, this disconcerting context rather serves as a driver for these supporters in establishing their supportive relationship with the entrepreneur, as value homophily against this disconcerting environment establishes a “shell” where they can thrive in developing entrepreneurial initiatives that reach out against such pressures.

The relationship with the third party is also contained in such a “shell”, so that the whole support path becomes a safe place where they can problematize, and even rebel, against a domineering context. In illustrative support path 1, the supporter provides support as a sort of relief from his frustrations with his own context, while still drawing from his skills as established in his own field (perhaps even experiencing a “purer” investigative spirit that would be coherent with his initial ideals to do “crazy journalism” through “tough questions”). In support path 3, the supporter both receives from the third party and gives to the entrepreneur interventions that genuinely push towards improving their businesses and gaining footholds, thereby doing all she can to generate success and create a trustworthy support system. This was quite poignantly described in support path “Five”, where the supporter stated that often she felt “thrown to the dogs”, while her third party is a safe haven for her.

Such a social context is not necessarily experienced as primarily antagonistic, as evidenced in support path 2. Here, the supporter finds a generally inspiring context in which she wishes to be inducted. The relationship with her third party and, subsequently, the entrepreneur, becomes the means to become more strongly connected to this overarching context of value systems. However, it should be pointed out that, especially when supporting the entrepreneur, she has become aware that the surrounding context is ruled by different “pockets” of values, where some entrepreneurs have values which are more similar to her own, and others are guided by other values. She sees these more as worlds that are distant from herself and embeds herself in a context that best suits the values she developed together with the third party. Similar to support paths 1 and 3, the support path still functions as a “shell”, but the supporter’s focus is more closely related to the inspiring drive of being inducted into a context that she aspires to be a part of. Her support, therefore,

becomes a pro-active stance to jump in with whatever favors she can provide, as well as demonstrating active interest by constantly engaging in conversation with the entrepreneur.

This “shell” can also be experienced as an enhancement of the values in the surrounding network. The support paths around Genes takes this to an extreme: set within a niche-culture market, certain relational practices are explicitly established as signals of shared values that bring participants together. When the participants in this niche begin conversations with each other, they are expected to demonstrate non-instrumental interests, exploring personal issues such as family and work-life challenges, then slowly moving into discussions of their shared hobbies. This was put in practice during the interview: the entrepreneur and his wife invited the interviewer to their apartment to hold the interview, and started by setting a full table of bread, cheese, and coffee, and showing interest in the interviewer’s child, visit in Brazil, frustrations through navigating traffic, and so on. Out of these signals, participants in this niche-culture market learn about the needs at hand, and respond to each other as they can, thereby solidifying their participation in the network. In his own network, the supporter in this support path is able to learn about new tendencies in the niche-market and relay this information to the entrepreneur, who can then incorporate the knowledge into his own strategy. Meanwhile, the supporter followed the dictates of their social context and demonstrated his concern for the entrepreneur’s personal life.

“If he didn’t tell me he needed money for the gasoline and toll to get around, how do I know if he able to put food on the table?”

Genes, supporter

This supporter’s worries about the entrepreneur’s wellbeing reflects the “rules of the game” at hand throughout the supporter’s network and directs efforts to extend support while simultaneously embedding the supporter within this network.

Here, we extend the literature on value homophily by pointing out the tension between the homophily experienced among the actors against an experienced negative experience of the values observed throughout the network, be it a mild sense of wariness or a more intense sense of threat

(situational homophily). The support path, for the supporter, becomes a way to secure their sense of security as they build their own position ruled by values which they find safe, comfortable, and desirable. It is important to emphasize that the *tension* between the experienced homophily and the overall dissonance is the driver that keeps the support path together, as relational practices (that is, interactions among the entrepreneur, supporter, and third party) emphasize their difference from the wider context and, therefore, follow rules that are distinct, and even opposed to, the wider context. Support, therefore, is the supporter's way to engage in a relational practice that glues the support path together as a "shell" against the wider context.

4.3.3.4 Supporters situating their relationship with the entrepreneur in their own network

While extant literature has shown the importance of efforts on entrepreneurs' side to incorporate the supporter in their network of direct ties for enhancing their access to valuable exchange support relationships (for example, Huang and Knight, 2017; Jack, 2005; Newbert et al., 2013; Vissa and Chacar, 2009), we turn to the supporters' view towards their own personal networks and how their relationship with the entrepreneur.

Chord-A has a support path that is illustrative of the interplay between structural and relational embeddedness. Different from Teresinha, in Chord-B, discussed in illustrative support path 2 above, who seeks opportunities to embed herself deeper in her own network, the supporter in Chord-A, Olegário, refrains from giving full support to the entrepreneur, even though he is a successful serial entrepreneur and fully capable of supporting. The key issue here around characterizing the support received, however, is that the supporter willfully refrains from giving support, even when presented with the opportunity. The entrepreneur explicitly described feeling mildly frustrated with this. Olegário is surrounded by other entrepreneurs who he sees as mostly similar to the founder of Chord and is concerned about clearly characterizing his role among all these entrepreneurs. Adding to this, the supporter is a consultant for a large consulting firm, who

has been granted desk space at the co-working space where all these entrepreneurs are located. One of the third parties the supporter describes is his hierarchical superior, who is also a seasoned entrepreneur and, therefore, quite capable of rendering and inspiring all sorts of vital support to all these entrepreneurs. Both the supporter and the third party have scoped out the opportunities for their own interests in creating connections and have settled on guidelines to both direct entrepreneurs towards discussions that will best serve their own institutional objectives within the consulting firm in which they work, and in finding a process that streamlines support most equally throughout the network. This demonstrates how the network surrounding the support constrains the support efforts.

The founder of Chord and Olegário, on the other hand, have found that they have similar interests and enjoy interacting with each other, and have started relating with each other outside of the co-working space. This way, the entrepreneur scopes out the limits of the supporter's resistance to supporting him, but places the supporter in an ambiguous position, where the founder of Chord begins to gain prominence in a network which, according to the supporter, should be kept at a more instrumental, egalitarian, level. The supporter does not fully refrain from this relationship, however, because it has become informative for him in how to respond and handle other entrepreneurs with whom he relates—what he learns in supporting and refraining from supporting the founder of Chord helps in shaping the support efforts to other entrepreneurs in his network—a discussion carried out repeatedly with his hierarchical superior, the third party. We see here that structural embeddedness has more subtleties at play beyond the (non)existence of a tie, since all these actors are, in some way, tied to each other. It is the terms, expectations, and conversations held among these actors within this structure of relationships that provides them with points of reflections, rendering the meaning of these relationships apparent and directing their relational practices with each other.

In illustrative support path 3, both the entrepreneur and the supporter are connected to similar people, due to their previous work experience. Since they both became entrepreneurs and closed

their first contracts with the company that they worked for, the nature of their relationships throughout this network has changed, from being collegial to more arms-length. As described above, this has led to an experience of antagonism in values that has solidified the support path to the entrepreneur. The crucial element here is that it is the make-up of these structural relationships as they are relationally experienced that sets the ground for this suspicion and resolution through supportive relational practices to arise. Support path 2, where Teresinha embeds herself in this network, becomes all the more clear when seen from this perspective: as she engages in relational practices throughout a network which she herself feels is supportive, she both deepens her relationship with the entrepreneur and the third party, while finding means to build new relationships that ground her even deeper in the network. Here, even though the third party is unconnected to the rest, it has become the entry point for her participation in the dense network that she aspires to join. Meanwhile, in support path 1, the supporter has conversations with several of his friends that share his professional and personal concerns, and serves as an integrative force to inspire them all towards solutions, by telling them about the different conversations he is holding among people and suggesting they interact more with each other on the grounds that he has managed to unearth in their conversations (Obstfeld, 2005).

Joystick-A has a support path where support is truncated. The entrepreneur turns to the supporter for emotional support, often meeting in prayer meetings where such emotional support efforts can be rendered in all sorts of dimensions of life (Lim & Putnam, 2010). They began their relationship when the entrepreneur was an intern and the supporter was his hierarchical superior. They have both moved on to become serial entrepreneurs in the technology field. The supporter is also a professor at a local university, and relates to other entrepreneurs that are at an initial stage of their endeavor. While the entrepreneur praised the supporter's availability for providing emotional support, this relationship is not a source of knowledge, provision of resources, or introduction to other actors, although all of these are within the supporter's capabilities. Rather, the supporter bemoaned the lack of initiative of junior entrepreneurs, such as the other students that he has

guided, in that they do not proactively seek him out. On the other hand, he is quite involved with the activities around building a new research center and masters' programs for his university, where he forms alliances and articulates resources entrepreneurially together with other senior professors. The supporter's network, therefore, has become partitioned into a group of mutual supporters that proactively interact with each other, and entrepreneurs who are less than active in reaching out when they need help, in the supporter's view. This, therefore, has made him reticent in extending his hand to the founder of Joystick in matters other than the emotional support expected from engaging in their prayer group. Instead of acting as a broker between these two groups, the experience of contrast between the relational practices in these two partitions shapes the supporter's responsiveness to the entrepreneur's need for support.

4.3.3.5 The role of supporting in developing the relationships at hand around the supporter

While the above section explored how the relationships enable supporting entrepreneurs, it is important to understand how supporting the entrepreneur contributes to the supporter's own relationships. Here, we assume that the actors in question are motivated to cultivate and maintain their relationships. We see in these three support paths various ways that the support serves to entrench the supporter within their surrounding relationships even more.

In the three illustrative support paths, we see three distinct ways this plays out. These vary in the sense of misgivings against which they experience their relationships to play out, in the general position in the network which they promote and compensate for harmful effects within the relationship. In support path 3, the supporter's relationships thrive on their distinctness against what is experienced as a nefarious system, where people are generally untrustworthy, duplicitous, and overly instrumental in their relationships. The supporter is less interested in changing this system than in being able to live according to her own values. Here, the misgivings are that the ecosystem's dangers will impede her business from thriving. By giving selfless support, emphasizing a

conversation that goes back and forth without any care for a balance sheet or exchange of fees, she is reinforced in her own values, both enabling her to continue giving support to others, as well as fostering her trust in her the people who share these values, protecting her from succumbing to what she feels to be the values held generally.

In support path 2, the supporter is mostly interested in gaining a foothold in the wider network so she can develop her career in the sort of environment, which her relationship with the third party inspired. By finding a likeminded entrepreneur who is older and more experienced than herself, she has found a vein through which she can continue to develop professionally and engage in matters of entrepreneurship. This makes her an eager supporter, a mechanism of which the entrepreneur is fully aware. Her availability to support, and even availability to be supportive to the entrepreneur by allowing herself to be coached according to his expectations (thereby reinforcing his own *modus operandi*), places her in a position to fully become embedded. Her tie to the third party is also benefitted because her eagerness to support the entrepreneur honors the training he gave her, bringing her mastery of his understanding of design to greater depths. She is also able to channel back to the third party what she learns from the elite circles in ways that can aid him in developing future students who, much like her, demonstrate interest for his passion for purpose-driven design.

In support path 1, the discussions with the third party have a dangerous side effect. While the conversations about leaving their comfortable jobs for entrepreneurial endeavors are kept playful with no real intention of leaving their comfortable corporate positions, the supporter quietly expressed the fact that these plans never come to fruition as being problematic, almost apologetically describing that they do not come to fruition because they fail to persist or do their duties “like they should”, in his words. At the same time, they continue to play the game of fantasizing about emancipation from their current jobs, always coming back to entrepreneurship as a solution which they do not pursue. By giving support to an actual entrepreneur, the supporter is relieved of this tension. By being a part of a real endeavor in some way, the supporter brings

grounds his understanding of entrepreneurship, effectively defusing the romantic views that are so enticing in the conversations with the third party. At the same time, the supporter whets his appetite for entrepreneurship sufficiently, able to go back to the corporate job and continue on his own career path with only minor disruptions.

So far, we have brought together the manners in which experienced similarity, in terms of values and situations, among actors who are connected with each other in meaningful relationships, can develop certain forms of support for entrepreneurs. The distinctiveness of the support path lies in how these actors are able to handle a wider social context. We now bring these insights together into a model that puts forth a full mechanism for support to be generated relationally.

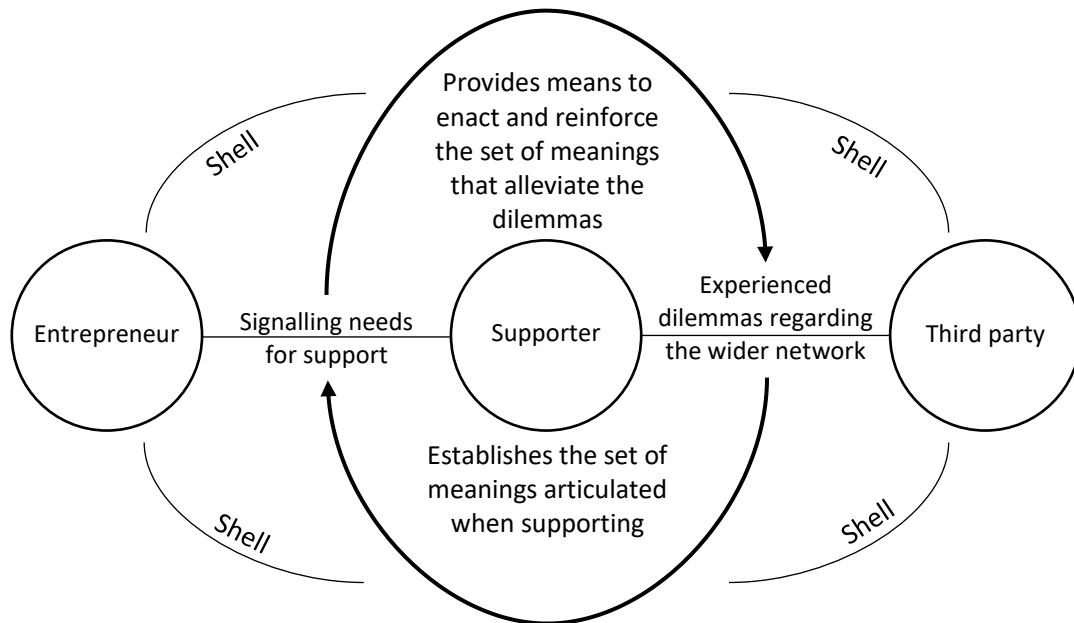
4.4 DISCUSSION

Now that we have characterized the support path in its structure, we can now discuss the mechanisms through which this happens. This is illustrated in Figure 3 below.

We should note that discussing the support path is like isolating a strand of spaghetti in a dish. The real-life manner of going about the relational setting of support to entrepreneurs is much messier. In the artificial setting of the interview, we slow down the “process” with the interviewee to consider how these paths are experienced and how they can compose the support efforts. Although we describe this in processual terms for didactic purposes, this should not be seen as a process model. The choice to use such terms is due to the linear form imposed by text.

Supporters provide access to several benefits that they do not control directly, but rather can access and streamline back to the entrepreneur. Such connections are embedded within several other relationships (Anderson, Park, & Jack, 2007; Jack & Anderson, 2002; McKeever et al., 2015; Newbert et al., 2013; Uzzi, 1996), which here we see can influence the supporter’s tie with the entrepreneur in powerful ways. This shows that the importance of indirect ties is more than the access to resources that direct ties provide to entrepreneurs, as initially proposed by Dubini and Aldrich (1991). These indirect ties to third parties enable the supporter to delve deeper into the

Figure 4.2 – Mechanisms in the support path



relationship with the entrepreneur, release their own knowledge stock, and direct their conversations in ways that leverage entrepreneur's position as a node in the supporter's network.

While Newbert et al. (2013) indicated that embedding supporters among other supporters is useful for acquiring support, we see here the reason this is helpful. Because actors entertain several relationships, these conversations inform each other. What an actor experiences in a given conversation with another actor provides new reference points to cultivate the experience of value homophily in relational practices with other actors in their own network. Relationships contaminate and influence other relationships. This constitutes a path of relationships, which the actors experience as distinct from the wider network.

Although we hone in on the participation in a story of support that composes a support path, these three people are also participants in a wider network. Since the thematic of the support given is entrepreneurial, they must consider what it means to participate in an entrepreneurial phenomenon and, consequently, participate in an entrepreneurial network (Garud et al., 2014). Therefore, as they participate in each relationship, they enact their position in the support path, at a close, intimate level while, simultaneously and more broadly, enacting their position in the wider entrepreneurial network.

This dual positioning in a wider network and within the support path can be experienced as problematic. In fact, problematization is part of the manner in which individuals experience relationality inasmuch as interests are not met and disagreements are negotiated while people try to gain footholds in the dynamics of relationships (White, 2008). All three actors along the support path experience their position in a wider network. This is to say, they experience the matter of entrepreneurship as a social phenomenon, grounded in a social structure (that is, network of relationships among individuals and, possibly, firms) and articulating values, expectations, interests, and practices. They experience this at different levels of desirability, where their interaction with other actors along these terms is either desirable to themselves, or not, in some degree. It is not necessary for them to have full awareness of the extent that these are desirable to them. Rather, their reaction to these through relational practices, such as supporting each other or engaging in conversations, is the key.

They reflect their experience of (un)desirability of the values, expectations, interests, and practices by engaging in conversations (which can be in the form of actions and gestures) with other actors—that is, they practice relationally (Steyaert & van Looy, 2010). Here, they are attracted to interact with those who are willing to negotiate the (un)desirability of such issues in terms that are sufficiently similar. These interactions, then, are set within and against the wider network of interactions (Garud et al., 2014), where the actors compare the values, expectations, interests and practices in their own relationship from what happens in the wider network *as they experience it*. This experience renders informational elements which these conversations articulate—that is, ideas, emotions, opinions, etc. The links formed among these elements are formally referred to as meanings (Martin & Lee, 2018). The *ease* with which the actors negotiate the terms of their relational practices around these issues renders an experience of similarity relative to the degree of similarity which they experience with the wider network in which they are members as they search and create solutions to the issues. Such ease to articulate the meanings at hand in their relationships is an experience of value homophily.

A relational path becomes a support path to an entrepreneur once an actor presents a need for their own startup. Until this moment, the relationships that were entertained by the actors were not necessarily a matter of positioning in the entrepreneurial network. However, once an actor presents an entrepreneurial need, the conversation shifts towards entrepreneurial matters, and the actors experience their membership in the wider network (Lee & Martin, 2018). This pairs the informational elements in the relationship with those derived from their experience in matters of entrepreneurship, infusing the relationships with entrepreneurial meaning. In other words, although the relationship between the supporter and the third party were not inherently relevant to the entrepreneur's entrepreneurial dilemma, the supporter might become reminded of elements that arose in the conversation with the third party and begin to pair elements in their conversation with the entrepreneur with elements in the conversation with the third party in order to support.

Interaction with the third party shapes support efforts towards the entrepreneur inasmuch as the support arises from the meanings articulated in these conversations along the support path. These meanings guide the supporter and the entrepreneur in establishing the choice of resources deployed in the support, how these resources will be used, and the terms upon which the relationship will be governed that will secure the access to the support as long as it is necessary. As this relationship is grounded in an experience of value homophily, relative to the wider network, the meanings articulated in supporting should in some degree reflect the attitude along the support path towards the problems experienced within and against the wider network.

Conversely, the entrepreneur's need for support and the support efforts to the entrepreneur speak to the tie between the supporter and the third party. Here, our view towards the supporter's relational setting provides a novel contribution to the discussion of support, as we see here that supporting the entrepreneur has a social function that is outside of the entrepreneur's situation. By providing a space for a behavioral response, rather than a conversation that is merely verbal, the supporter is inspired towards resolution of undesirable experiences within and against the wider network as experienced with the third party. Again, it is important to recognize that this might not

have yet even been experienced by the supporter and third party as a dilemma of the entrepreneurial network prior to the entrepreneur's request for support. In any case, the supporter's relationship with the entrepreneur provides new meaning (linkages) for the elements that arise from the supporter's shared experience with the third party, serving their interests regarding the wider entrepreneurial network. As such, membership in a support path is crystalized, at least momentarily, forming a set of two relationships that provide support, on the one hand, and resolution of dilemmas, on the other, all bound together through the supporter's experience of value homophily, distinguishing them from the wider network.

4.4.1 Limitations and future research

The main limitation in the present study is that we have perhaps over-emphasized the mechanisms that make ties stronger and have not given any attention to the support that might be received from casual acquaintances or instrumental ties. From the accounts rendered in the interviews, we can say that such support does happen, but the framework did not allow exploration of these relationships, and the snowballing sampling technique employed did not lend itself to setting up interviews with these supporters. Similarly, issues regarding financial, or, more broadly, instrumental, support, were absent in the interview process. We simply cannot extend the mechanisms described above regarding relational practices that uphold the support path to relationships where clear, explicit, and measurable expectations are set. While the narratives described issues that span over time, the above insights were drawn from interviews in a single time frame. We would like to see how these mechanisms, particularly around value homophily, multiplexity, and closure evolve as supporters navigate new situations.

While we have set out to draw attention to supporters' relational contexts as a means to explain the support they render, another framework would be to explore psychological dimensions, such as emotional, affective, cognitive, or trait-based explanations for such behavior. This would

provide a more well-rounded view of the motivations at play that secure and shape the rendering of support.

Quantitative studies can extend the findings here by inviting informants to map out their values, and what they suppose are the values of others in their network and in society in general, thereby testing the value homophily/heterophily mechanism. This could also be tested experimentally, by placing participants in situations of greater or less homophily and giving them the chance to render favors to each other. The use of diaries in co-working spaces can allow a tracking of themes throughout relationships, and then events of requests for support can then be flagged, with responses tracked to see which themes are drawn upon to actively shape the support that is rendered. This can also further explore where support is denied, and why.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Supporters support because it makes sense *for them to do so*. Support behooves them. This is because they are already in relationships (Small, 2017), one of which is with the entrepreneur and, hence, the entrepreneur's need for support for their project comes to the foreground. Resources are accessed by the entrepreneur through the supporter because their relationship thrives—it is meaningful. However, to emphasize the flow of resources within a given structure, rather than the establishment of relationships, is to miss the point how support works. We have demonstrated that supporters are social agents, and that supporting entrepreneurs makes sense within supporters' own positions within support paths, where they stand between an entrepreneur and third parties.

Our main contribution is that we have shifted attention away from entrepreneurs' efforts to build a supportive network and shown that supporters have an active role in establishing a relational context where support can take different shapes, a mechanism we refer to as a "support path". We have shown that these shapes are largely influenced by experiences of homophily within these relationships. Most importantly, we have emphasized supporters' own agency in responding to these social contexts throughout the relationships at hand in the support path, situating the support

rendered within the social challenges that supporters face. We have achieved this through a decidedly different approach methodologically, veering away from questionnaires and embracing an interpretivist, reconstructivist narrative analysis in order to fully delve into the experience of being in the relational structure we inquire about, that is, the support path.

From this, we can suggest that entrepreneurs are best off by clearly signaling their needs for support within the conversations that they have. However, this should follow organically, as they also allow space for potential supporters to signal their own concerns and interests. In other words, the need to signal is important, but not urgent. They can allow space for supporters to explore the needs for support and shape the support they will render, because this will further embed the entrepreneur within the supporter's network. Supporters, on the other hand, do well to direct conversations to their own concerns, feeling out how entrepreneurs respond. Incubators, mentoring programs, and other institutional forms of support to entrepreneurs can provide space for relationships to thrive on their own, and perhaps even against the dominant discourses within these settings. Encouragement for supporters should be provided for them to seek out conversations which they themselves find inspiring, entrenching them within their own networks as a source of inspiration for the support they can render.

Chapter 5

D'Artagnan's "Special" Theory of Community: Entrepreneurs Operate Culture from a Situated Position

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ABSTRACT

When building relationships, actors are faced with ambiguity within and throughout the surrounding network. They strive to navigate the social situations at hand to establish their place in the network by operating culture. I hold that operating culture stems from an immediate challenge of relational ambiguity. I draw attention to the relational challenges, that is, "situations", faced when entangled actors live in community. Through ethnographic observation of a small French town, I discuss how interactions highlight the "eccentricity" of the community members. Participants in this entrepreneurial process achieve a "situated position", from which a cultural operator can disentangle a situation.

« La loyauté ambiguë de l'étranger est, malheureusement, très souvent plus qu'un simple préjugé de la part du groupe qui l'accueille. Elle est en particulier incontestable dans le cas où l'étranger s'avère réticent ou incapable de substituer intégralement au modèle culturel de son groupe d'origine le nouveau modèle culturel. Alors l'étranger demeure ce que Park et Stonequist ont adéquatement nommé un 'homme marginal', un hybride culturel qui vit à la frontière de deux modèles différents de vie, sans savoir vraiment auquel des deux il appartient. »
Alfred Schütz, L'Étranger, Un Essai de Psychologie Sociale (2014 [1943])

*"Gentles, do not reprehend: if you pardon, we will mend:
And, as I am an honest Puck, If we have unearned luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue, We will make amends ere long;
Else the Puck a liar call; So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends, And Robin shall restore amends."*
Robin Goodfellow
(A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act V, Scene I)

5.0 INTRODUCTION

A longstanding tradition in entrepreneurship studies has been to inquire about the role of networks in the process of entrepreneurship (Hoang & Yi, 2015; Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010). Entrepreneurs draw on networks to achieve a plethora of benefits such as access to resources (Dubini & Aldrich, 1991), social support (McKeever et al., 2014), and legitimacy (Podolny, 2001), just to name a few. By participating in a local network, they build endeavors that reflect the culture, economic structure, and partnerships that are locally available (Spigel, 2017).

Culture is at the heart of this process, functioning as a repository of cues and references held and articulated by different groups, with which entrepreneurs skillfully interact (Jennings, Greenwood, Lounsbury, & Suddaby, 2013; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019). Entrepreneurs operate culture (Überbacher, Jacobs, & Cornelissen, 2015; see also Schutz & Luckmann, 1974). While this approach has drawn attention to the different audiences to be addressed (Byrne & Shepherd, 2015; Zott & Huy, 2007), it has yet to expose the structural grounding which constrains and enables these processes. On the other hand, network theories in entrepreneurship have mostly privileged measurements of the structure, rather than unpacking the relational tensions that underpin any given network (Feld, 1981; Jack, 2010; Padgett & Powell, 2012). Actors caught up in the processes of entrepreneurship are more immediately fueled by the particular challenging relational situations at hand (Lounsbury et al., 2019). How do actors who are caught up in entrepreneurial action, either acting as entrepreneurs or supporters to entrepreneurs' endeavors, operate culture to achieve and embrace their position in the entrepreneurial process?

The present paper contributes to cultural entrepreneurship literature (Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Lounsbury et al., 2019; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019) and entrepreneurial relationality literature (Anderson et al., 2012; Garud, Gehman, & Tharchen, 2017; Steyaert & Katz, 2004; Steyaert & van Looy, 2010) by drawing from Relational Sociology to describe the actions taken to resolve these positions occupied within the network of vibrant, dynamic, meaningful relationships (Fuhse,

2015b; Mische, 2014; White, 2008). Such a positional resolution of relationships in the entrepreneurship process is brought about as actors operate the culture around them (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017; Hjorth & Holt, 2016; Überbacher et al., 2015). My description opens a view of entrepreneurial action that provokes and shapes a community as a thriving, meaningful, network (Kwon, Heflin, & Ruef, 2013; Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Vestrum, 2014).

In this paper, I employ relational ethnography (Desmond, 2014) to enhance the entrepreneurial processes and experiences among the actors. Building from thick description (Crapanzano, 1986), I present the experiences of divide among people in a French village, here referred to as Combrayville¹³. I came to observe that several people in this village felt themselves to be at the intersections of this divide. Curiously, each person described the divide in different ways, although each one claimed to be the sole person in the story who could bridge this divide. These actors described their social environment as eccentric in some way, and presented themselves within these eccentricities through a specific symbolic marker, referring to them as "Special". Things came to a head when I, in the role of ethnographer, was swept up in the divide, as one of the villagers bestowed upon me the function of cultural operator due to my own unique, "special" quality as a foreigner, outsider, and social scientist.

From these accounts and experiences, I explore how the relational structure in a community imposes an experience of disjoint and mismatch among actors. Simultaneously, such experiences lead to the retelling of stories ("planting") and shifting of relationships ("articulating") that establishes their own networks as they position themselves within the surrounding relationships. When seen phenomenologically, these networks emerge from life-worlds that have different outlooks for different actors, leading them to draw from different cues and references. These experienced networks are the stages where actors operate culture within and against a notion of "divide" that uniquely captures the "special" position they occupy in a "special" network as they seek to gain a foothold in the context of interactions throughout their community.

¹³ All names and locations have been anonymized.

5.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

5.1.1 The process of entrepreneurship as a relational phenomenon

Entrepreneurship is a process of social change through interaction (Steyaert & van Looy, 2010). It is experienced as if it were a series of events (Garud et al., 2017; Selden & Fletcher, 2015). These events imply connectivity (Anderson et al., 2012), which essentially is communicating by reflecting what is meaningful across different audiences (Lounsbury et al., 2019; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Zott & Huy, 2007). Actors caught up in an entrepreneurial process interact in a collective narrative (Garud et al., 2014, 2017). This systemic view decentralizes the narrative of entrepreneurship (Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Garud et al., 2018), revealing the push and pull of collective actions in networks (Steyaert & van Looy, 2010) as they are rooted within a particular community (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2018; Munro, 2018).

The focus of these actions brings actors together. Action requires objects in space, and it is in reaching out in this space that actors find each other (Steyaert & van Looy, 2010). Relational sociology describes social foci, capturing the intuition that there is a focus to action, and that the nature of this focus is social inasmuch as it brings people into shared social space (Feld, 1981, 1982; Small, 2017). The more actors share foci, the more their actions will be organized around each other, constituting a community (Feld, 1982). Actors find themselves in encounters that disrupt what they are about, triggering a process they will now have to resolve (Duymedjian, Germain, Ferrante, & Lavissière, 2019).

A community is “an aggregation of people that is not defined initially by the sharing of goals or the productive activities of the enterprise but, rather, by shared geographical location, generally accompanied by collective culture and/or ethnicity and potentially by other shared relational characteristic(s)” (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006: 315). Just as an organization is an overarching structure that enhances how a particular network is more than associations between nodes (Brass

& Krackhardt, 2012), a community roots the experience of the network in the shared place to which actors belong and that belongs to the actors—a living, breathing knot of energizing relationships (Kwon et al., 2013). Communities are rife with expectations about how to go about one's challenging situations, since these are situated within collective actions that (de)stabilize sets of relationships (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2018; Steyaert & Katz, 2004).

Actors are organized both in structures of relationships, that is, a network, and in clusters of meaning, that is, culture (Anderson et al., 2012; Garud et al., 2014; White, 2008). In this paper, I seek to explore both of these dimensions according to how they play out in actors' experience of their positions as nodes in a network (members in a community). Therefore, on the structural side, I refer to such matters as positions, social foci, and networks. On the cultural side, I review narratives and culture (as a set of interconnected elements, that is, meanings), and how these relate to social space. I show that interaction among actors is fostered by situations that enhance the (structural) disjoint and (cultural) mismatch among them as they problematize and co-create their community in entrepreneurial actions, ultimately operating culture and establishing ground for the "special" positions they occupy.

5.1.2 Breaking down culture, building up relationships

Culture is currently defined as "a set of resources—a toolkit that can be agentially drawn upon by skilled actors" (Lounsbury et al., 2019: 1216; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001: 549). Given the challenges described above, defining culture as a set of resources as a "toolkit" has the added benefit of operationalizing culture as something that can be broken down into elements that can be operationalized. When discussing this intimate relationship between culture and relationship dynamics, Relational Sociology has referred to these "resources" as "meanings" (Mische & White, 1998; Pachucki & Breiger, 2010; White et al., 2007). For this literature, cultural elements, *meanings*, are coupled and decoupled as stories and narratives unfold according to the configuration of the situation at hand. It should come as no surprise that Schütz (2014:12 [1943]),

in his psychosocial essay *L'Etranger*, then, was more preoccupied with the « *modèle culturel de la vie d'un groupe* » than with pinpointing a particular control over resources or capital. Meanings and relationships are intimately connected in actors' life-worlds (Schütz & Luckmann, 1974).

Harrison White suggested operationalizing this intimate connection of systems of meanings and systems of relationships as “netdoms” (White, 2008). These are the conjunction of a set of relationships with a set of meanings, tied together by situations that establish the network at hand. The meanings are not “owned” by a particular actor, as resources that are articulated as a form of capital, but rather occur and emerge in new configurations within problematic situations experienced by the actors in the relationships bound in social foci (White, 1995, 2008). Netdoms bring a dimension of life-world to the network maps that describe structures of relationships, effectually operationalizing a solution to the provocation to embrace actors' experiences in scientific inquiry (Ibarra et al., 2005; Jack, 2010).

Inasmuch as these links between meanings enable strategic action through their stories and overarching enacted narratives (Cope, 2005a; Küpers, Mantere, & Statler, 2013; Überbacher et al., 2015), they are experienced as problematic (Collins, 1981). It is not the meanings themselves that are problematic, but the effect of their combination in opening up (or closing off) action as the actors co-create the associations among meanings.¹⁴ It is more about the act of co-creating these associations than about the meanings themselves (Quinn & Dutton, 2005). The point of operating culture, and what makes for “skillful” operation of culture, is that context specific conversations are able to open up the possibility of strategic actions (Überbacher et al., 2015).

5.1.3 Situations that challenge the networked relational structure

When actors interact, they can often find themselves in events where the established culture is challenged (Duymedjian et al., 2019). Relational sociology defines situations as “problematic,

¹⁴ *Attention, chers lecteurs : parfois « L'étranger » qui est devant vous n'est pas « L'étranger » que vous attendiez.*

high-stakes episodes that cast our prescribed roles and trajectories into question". (Mische & White, 1998: 697). An actor's position in interactions is established through the stories and narratives that justify their position. When these situations challenge the established stories of the relationships, their position falls into ambiguity (White, 1995, 2008).

Different positions within the network afford different possibilities to actors (Burt et al., 2000). The position is not simply chosen at the whim of the focal actor, but rather responds to the situations that plays out in the shared social space (Mische & White, 1998; White, 1995, 2008). Situations expose the inadequacy of efforts to enhance commonalities and draw light to the disjoint and mismatch among actors, since they cannot easily escape the social space in which they are bound. Situations, therefore, hinge on actors sharing a particular place and time (Feld, 1981; Labianca & Brass, 2006).

Relational sociology is skeptical of rationalistic interpretations of interaction precisely because of this (Jones et al., 1997). Rather than assume that actors enter into a situation with intention and strategies, this literature understands that such intentions and strategies are rendered meaningless by the situations in which actors find themselves (Fuhse, 2015b). They struggle, first and foremost, not to gain advantage over others, but to resolve the ambiguity that has become problematic in interaction and (re)establish their position (Mische & White, 1998; White, 1995, 2008).

"A French Puck" is a folk tale from Vieux-Boucau-les-Bains (Lang, 1910). Picture a bride. Her dress had been hastily sewn together with a string that was fortuitously stumbled upon right when the seamstress needed it. But, as she stood in the church before the whole congregation, right at the moment when her marriage to her groom was to be established, the fortuitous string that held her dress together disappeared! It had not been a simple string at all, but rather a shape-shifting sprite, none other than that knavish one known among the Anglo-Saxons as Puck. Faced by her exposed nakedness, the congregation covered her in their coats and rescued her from shame. In short, to attain the benefits that community involvement can offer, actors must expose themselves

to the risk of facing challenging situations which are vague, at best, and conflictive, at worst (Vestrum, 2014; White, 2008). Although awkward, these are also opportunities to make the relationship more tolerable, even profitable (Kwon et al., 2013).

The development of relationships in a community is a matter of actors encountering actors against a situation among them as they make sense of how much they are mismatched, struggling to gain a foothold in the ambiguity (Padgett & Powell, 2012). These situations open up the possibility to operate the cultures at hand among the actors who are tied to each other (Johnson, 2007; Schuetz [sic], 1944; Überbacher et al., 2015). They are required to invest their time and energy in handling their disjoints and mismatches as they manage the foci which guide their routines. Anderson *et al.* (2012: 958, 963) suggest that entrepreneurship is a “complex adaptive system”, that ultimately, leads us to delve into theoretical and practical stories of connecting. Therefore, entrepreneurship is a complicated, unsettling, navigation of mismatch in relationships, situations that fold and unfold as actors strive to take positions amongst themselves in their community (Berglund, Gaddefors, & Lindgren, 2016). This happens through the challenge to operate culture (Überbacher et al., 2015).

5.1.4 Communities as relational narratives

Phenomenologically, the experience of resolved situations all folds up into narratives of resolved situations (Garud et al., 2014). As an immediate level of brute experience, there is no narrative or coherence—the established, accepted sets of meanings, or culture, is challenged and broken into an underlying ambiguity that rested just barely out of eyesight, as if it had been forgotten. Then, in retrospective reflection, they are strung together through their emerged meaning, linking this resolved challenge into a larger narrative that has become apparent (Schütz, 1970; Schütz & Luckmann, 1974; White, 1995; White et al., 2007).

It would be no surprise that there is a notion of rationality, that is, of strategic action pursuing an outcome, that emerges with the benefit of hindsight (Hjorth, 2007). However, this narrative of

strategic action is at the service of a present challenge (Garud et al., 2017). The narrative meets the current situation at hand and justifies the position the narrating actor(s) occupy in their network (Mische & White, 1998). Narratives capture the experience, gathering up the emerging meanings and string them together into a whole (White, 1995).

In attempting to reconcile the matter how eastern Asian cultures handle public spaces as Western European theories have dealt with relational spaces, Ikegami (2000) drew attention to the intimate connection of the agent's experience of mismatch with the narratives that establish the network as a cohesive community. For her, this movement towards resolution is the crux that encompasses both personal experience and social structure. Clashes in cultures across the groups seek resolution firstly within the actor who experiences them, establishing stories and narratives around their own experience through which to enact their positions. It is within a given actor's own experience that the social foci are adjusted to the constraints and enablers of social space (Cardinale, 2018). Krackhardt (1999) showed that finding one's self at such a convergence of cultures across groups can be a source of intense, paralyzing suffering. Since entrepreneurship requires both exposure to new groups and deepening local relationships, the process of entrepreneurship is always at risk of becoming hindered by overextending through different groups, that is, "standing in two boats", or getting too comfortable within one single group and "sitting in a Chinese lap" (Lu and Mcinerney, 2016: 2125; see also Burt *et al.*, 2000).

Stories and narratives have been discussed as a matter of impression management, that is, as a means to engage particular audiences (Byrne & Shepherd, 2015; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). Here, the audience's participation is only in defining a field where certain symbols are available, and which the entrepreneur agentically articulates to achieve their goal (Zott & Huy, 2007). This is coherent with the above understanding that the relational space is of an intangible nature, constraining and enabling actors' actions, with the focus being on the entrepreneur's actions to address audiences that can either accept or reject their efforts (Cardinale, 2018).

On the other hand, relational literatures in entrepreneurship have left more space to recognize the agency of other actors in the entrepreneurial process (Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Garud et al., 2018; Turgo, 2016). In this perspective, entrepreneurship emerges as a force of social change as these actors approach the shared social foci with their own expectations (Hjorth, 2005). They act with similar social foci, and collectively struggle around the stories and narratives that will capture the issues at hand (McKeever et al., 2015). Encounters among actors prompt them – force them even – to find new narratives for where they are, change their own perspectives and foci of attention, and stumble upon new opportunities (Duymedjian et al., 2019). The process of entrepreneurship is seen to emerge from this struggle in the encounter as novel symbolic resources and uses for these appear and others fall away (Hjorth & Holt, 2016).

From this perspective, then, we see that, rather than the narrative of achievements being the driver, as if interaction were motivated by self-interest, it is rather the opposite. Interaction is its own motivator by first placing existing stories and narratives into question and opening the way for reconfiguration. Even the exercise of the process of entrepreneurship is more than a matter of resource acquisition and deployment, but rather a process of community development where entrepreneurial action emerges among actors (Garud et al., 2017; Hjorth & Holt, 2016; Steyaert & van Looy, 2010). The magic word is “*laway lang ang kapital*”, that is, “saliva as capital” (Turgo, 2016: 83). This expression refers to the way the community described by Turgo performs economic practices that enable delayed payments. This is a means to uphold community structure: actors’ efforts to faithfully honor promises sustains a community where members can thrive.

In short, culture binds actors in social foci through stories and overarching enacted narratives. This view is coherent with the process of entrepreneurship as a narrative (Garud et al., 2014; Hjorth, 2007). Before action in these settings can be understood, the realm of being should be addressed in the form of positions in life-worlds (Schütz, 1970). I turn to the experience of challenge in these social spaces that are fraught with situations—specifically, communities (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2018; Garud et al., 2017; Munro, 2018).

5.2 METHODOLOGY

In order to explore the phenomenon of positions in a network through which culture is operated, there is a need for a language that can capture relational dynamics in their emerging properties as narratives (for example, Anderson et al., 2012; Byrne & Shepherd, 2015; Garud et al., 2014; Hjorth & Reay, 2018; Jack, 2010). I present below excerpts from an ethnographic account of my involvement with the people of Combrayville, highlighting the moments of mismatch throughout the relationships. My description does not focus on the outcome. This is not a description of a process of resolution that could result in a script that would become sterile once emulated as such, instead of challenging readers to creatively rise to their own highly contextualized situations. Rather, the description is organized around the experience of disjoint and mismatch, portraying the challenges in engaging with the agents of the entrepreneurial process in Combrayville¹⁵. This mismatch among the actors express challenges the informant is currently navigating in their relationships (Ruffle & Sosis, 2006). This invokes alliances among actors in overcoming these difficulties—and invites the listener (that is, the researcher, the reader) to take sides (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). I highlight the eccentricities that emerge from these encounters, as these became both triggers and facilitators in the actors' struggles to gain a foothold in the ambiguous situation.

Rather than turn to questionnaires, I rely on heavily descriptive qualitative methods to develop the present theory. Qualitative methods have been particularly insightful in showing how entrepreneurial relationships constitute an aggregate experience of place (McKeever et al., 2015), in finding how entrepreneurs handle relationally strong and weak ties (Jack, 2005), in drawing attention to how entrepreneurs entice different audiences (Zott & Huy, 2007), in showing culturally

¹⁵ « En outre, le propos de cet article n'est pas d'examiner les processus sociaux d'assimilation et d'ajustement, dont traite une abondante littérature, en grande partie excellente, mais plutôt la situation d'approche qui précède tout ajustement social et le conditionne par avance. » (Schütz, 2014:9 [1943])

bound social mechanisms that sustain ecosystems (Turgo, 2016), in exploring community entrepreneurs' balancing act between embedding locally and drawing from external cultural and social capital (Vestrum, 2014), and in critically problematizing agency in an entrepreneurial process to draw attention to the role of context (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017).

The present qualitative study seeks to present the meanings actors articulate as they (we) go about navigating their (our) relational setting. The aim is to provide insights into the way actors struggle to get a foothold in the space they are in (White, 2008). From the several possible grounds for mismatch it should be clear that capturing these analytically requires a phenomenological approach of actors' experience of commonality or mismatch (Anderson et al., 2012; Garud et al., 2014; Steyaert & Katz, 2004). Therefore, this is an exercise in Relational Ethnography, which privileges views of boundaries and cultural conflict rather than classificatory conclusions about places or demographically bounded groups (Desmond, 2014).

My objective with this study is first and foremost to give space for the meanings people attribute to the relational context they navigate, similar to the phenomenological investigation regarding strategy as a performative narrative for organizing (Küpers et al., 2013) and entrepreneurs' experience of failure as a learning experience (Cope, 2011). My assumption is that agency is bound by context, where actors both shape and are shaped by the context in which they find themselves (Anderson & Ronteau, 2017; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017). Although I place physical location at the forefront of this account—in this case, bounded by the context of a village, and highly concentrated around the center square of the town, which imposes high frequency of interaction—I see this space as *relational* in nature (Anderson & Gaddefors, 2016; Vestrum, 2014).

Jack (2010) suggests that phenomenological insight into actors' experience in a network can complement the extant work which describes the effects of the overall structure. Describing the actors' experience should untangle issues of agency by placing the individual in the foreground of the analysis (regarding phenomenology in entrepreneurship studies, see Cope, 2005; Drakopoulou

Dodd, Anderson, & Jack, 2013). This explores what actors do with imperfect, possibly incorrect information as they infer that something is off (Schuetz [sic]¹⁶, 1944). Such an approach is deemed necessary for theorizing the forces and contents that drive the formation of ties. Jack cites ethnography as a viable means to achieve this goal (see also Ibarra et al., 2005). Ethnographic accounts in social network analysis include Jack's work following networking strategies (Anderson & Jack, 2002) and in entrepreneurs' involvement with local communities (McKeever et al., 2015), as well as in the study of network-designing behavior (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Vestrum, 2014), gestures of symbolic management (Zott & Huy, 2007), and community-building practices (Anderson & Obeng, 2017; Gaddefors & Anderson, 2018; Turgo, 2016).

This account takes the "peopled ethnography" approach (Fine, 2003) to theory building from ethnography. In this approach, attention is given to individuals' position within a group, highlighting their interaction out of interviews and observation of their relation to their environments, seeking to build theory inductively out of the account. This approach embraces prior theoretical work as a basis for the observations, understanding that the theory which will be built from the ethnographic observation relates to a greater body of scientific inquiry.

I recognize my place in the system as both a participant and an interpreter of the case. In an effort which has been called "critical auto/ethnography" (Hanson, 2004), I also draw attention to my own experience within the situations at hand as a privileged view (though admittedly far from unbiased) into the "uncanny" details in the accounts that can express the quotidian of the actors in this research setting, in the way it occurred during the period in which the observation was carried out. Although I report my own experiences in the field as a participant and observer, the focus is still on the group and all its observed members, differentiating this from "autoethnography". As a participant, my role is practically an "experiment" in the effect of adding one more "node" to the network in Combrayville. In fact, my presence explicitly "shifted" an equilibrium that the actors

¹⁶ Ironically, the spelling of Schütz' name was "adapted" in the original print of "The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology", in the *American Journal of Sociology* (1943), v. 49, n. 6.

had experienced and provoked a situation which led to change in the social space (Berglund et al., 2016; Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017; Mische & White, 1998). In a sense, simply by pursuing an empirical answer to the question of how mismatch plays out in social networks, I was provoking a rudimentary illustration of the answer I sought: the existence of La Salle de les Gamelans brought me to the square where I would meet several people I would never have met under different circumstances, and would participate in a “special” situation that would reshuffle the network at hand. Such shift provided key insight into the way actors deal with their struggle to deal with the difficulties implied in ties.

As an exercise in social-psychological phenomenology, I assume that actors involved are partially aware of the phenomenon at hand, and therefore can aid in theorizing the phenomenon, inasmuch as they are « *l’homme qui agit et pense en son sein* ». Simultaneously, I see them as somewhat unaware of the full social-psychological process at hand that interests me, « *le sociologue* » Schütz, (2014 [1944]:16; Schütz, 1970).

My entry point into Combrayville was through La Salle des Gamelans, which is an association established to bridge perceived gaps in the social structure of the village. Associations provide such spaces where innovative solutions can be bred (Furnari, 2013), where relationships can be built and thrive in intimacy-building activities (Kwon et al., 2013; Lim & Putnam, 2010). However, associations can also provide foci for actors’ actions which impose contact among actors who would not normally select each other for interaction. Therefore, this setting presents itself as a space within a community where mismatch can run amok throughout relationships (Glanville, 2016). A few actors shared their time with me in this story. Guylaine and Robert were the founders of La Salle des Gamelans, and provided me with access into the field. Camille is on the board of La Salle des Gamelans. Across from the fab lab/co-working space, on the main square, is Le Café Est Ici, the main café run by M. and Mme Colpeyn. There is some explicit antagonism between the two, as both are spaces to bring people together. At the café, I met D’Artagnan, a young man who moved from the nearby urban center, Flodoard, and takes odd jobs around town, including his

current one at the tourist information desk. Interaction with them provided accounts of their experience in challenging situations, and caught me up in efforts to disentangle a particular situation. By visiting them *in loco*, I could observe cultural and symbolic cues in their environment. Excerpts from the ethnographic account are presented in the following section in order to ground the subsequent theoretical discussion by texturizing, contextualizing, and provoking¹⁷. This is an invitation to delve into the life-world from whence theory is drawn.

5.3 GENERAL ETHNOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS

Under my feet: melting snow, invisible but audible as it trickled through gravel, like the rustle of dust on a vinyl record.

Under the sky, blue as only a wintry day can be, lulled by the silence, I dozed on a bench in violation of the Capitalist/Protestant declaration that time is money which keeps me driven and against the better judgements of urban street smarts that have more often than not kept me from being a victim of urban crime. For my last hour in Combrayville, I was stranded. I had arrived promptly at 8:20, held an interview, hiked, and sat at the local café and the first bus out would leave at 13:24. An hour later, I was on the bus that took me down the mountain in twenty-six minutes, back to the city where people like me had things to do.

Just downhill from the church cemetery, La Salle de les Gamelans was being birthed by some of the locals. It was to be a fab lab, a civic center, a co-working space, a hub, a catalyst of sorts.

Human existence is in relationship. Even when isolated, there is a connection to the surroundings and the events past, present, and future. The actor seeks to establish their position. In this excerpt, I, as the ethnographer, have already satisfied my interest in the region, and there is no further benefit to be obtained. And still, there is a longing to establish connections. This is reflected in a somewhat self-indulgent, stylish discourse. Even though this discourse is self-indulgent, it is drenched in the Other in these relationships, that is, La Salle des Gamelans, Combrayville, the villagers pouring something heavy into something, and even the megalopole where I used to live. Through this discursive act, I take stock of my situation, that is, a resolved task, and establish my own position, now as someone removed from Combrayville. This illustrates that actors are

¹⁷ The full account is provided in Appendix C. The reader is invited to read the full account at this time.

motivated, not only by rational, self-interested, strategic behavior, but rather by relationship establishing resolution of a situation that is already problematizing the position they are in. What does it mean to be in relationships in Combrayville for those who are swept up in the entrepreneurial process provoked by La Salle des Gamelans? I got a taste of this when I was accompanied by one of the residents on the bus back to Flodoard.

The grocer, d'Artagnan told me with a wink, "is a special person."

"A 'special' person?" I asked.

"You know," d'Artagnan said, again with a grin and a wink, "some people are 'special'." He went on to tell me about how it took some patience to handle the grocer, how he would do things in his own time and his own way and could be somewhat gruff.

He made a point of saying that not everything is well in Combrayville, even though everyone says "hi" to everyone else in the street. Because he talked with everyone, he had a view of how different groups saw each other. He drew an invisible circle on the back of the seat in front of us with the tip of his finger, then drew an imaginary squiggle down the middle: there was a clear divide in the village. On the one side of the circle, there were the cosmopolitan newcomers and, on the other, the farm hands. From what I could gather from what he told me about what he had heard out and about, the farmers and farm hands felt that the newcomers thought they were above those who did manual labor, that they would never dirty their hands with work that was done manually. He described frustrations he had heard out and about: these people did not use the local businesses.

In the other camp, among the cosmopolitan newcomers who held office jobs in the nearby city, people who did research "like yourself", he said, the opinion was that the farmhands and other "original" inhabitants of Combrayville were too rough, and for this reason avoided contact with them. This town, he reiterated, was not what it seemed to be. Rather, it was divided, people didn't get along as well as they should: it was "special", he concluded.

I asked him where he was in this divided circle. He placed the tip of his finger right on the imaginary line. "I am here, in the middle. I guess that makes me 'special'."

According to this informant, at the level of the town, they are divided. Simultaneously, everyone is "special". He describes being special as a form of eccentricity, perhaps having particular features that make things difficult for the people with whom we relate. He refers to me as being part of one of the groups, "like yourself". But he is also unique, eccentric, "special". His theory is that, by being placed at the intersection of the divide in the town, due to his openness to interacting with everyone, he becomes "special". Interacting with everyone, instead of bringing benefits, comes saddled with difficulties as it enhances his eccentricity, neither fully from one

group or the other. It was curious that this repeated in the accounts people gave: although they spontaneously stated that there was a great disjointed mismatch in the community, they all gave different descriptions of what the nature of this mismatch was, and even did not present the same disjointed groups. Still, the mismatched disjoint was seen as something that could be resolved when the special person at the divide mediated the differences. The following excerpt describes this process with much optimism.

Their way of doing things was not so much resisted, as misunderstood. Misunderstandings, as she understood it, could be overcome through communication. She gave the example of Louis Colpeyn, the owner of the café across from where La Salle de les Gamelans was being set up. He had misgivings because he saw the brewery as competition. She said that the president of La Salle de les Gamelans, Guylaine, approached the café and talked things out. First, Guylaine explained to them that beer would only be sold at the times of the meetings of the brewery, and not all the time. Second, they thought together about how they could work things out. The owner of the café then saw value in promoting the beer produced in the town: tourists would buy the local beer. As Camille described it, some open communication and creative thinking, mutual agreements could be found that improved things for everybody—the sharing economy thrives.

Here, focus is given to the effort to solve the issue. The special person in the story slowed down the process and broke it down into elements, or meanings, that could be articulated. She explains how the new project actually does enhance the interests, instead of set people at odds with each other. As an ethnographer, instead of reproducing the informant's words, I draw attention to the fact that I am an active participant as a witness to her words. In a sense, this episode reproduces the same mechanism she describes about Guylaine, who was not present in the room as she described this story. This description shows how my informant here meticulously described the situation to me, and that I understood it and embraced it into my own ethnographic text¹⁸. Similarly, the owner of the café, Louis Colpeyne, responded to Guylaine's calm description, that is, her strategic articulation of culture, by incorporating it into his own interests, and tying this incorporation into a larger narrative of their shared community's interest, that is, attracting and

¹⁸ This interview was recorded and transcribed. However, the excerpt enhances the observation at hand by describing my own position and response to her words.

serving tourists. The informant's attention is guided around reducing the difficulty to a malleable misunderstanding, rather than an impossible conflict. By skillfully operating culture, the entrepreneur was able to achieve her goal in a win-win solution. This would be an excellent example of how entrepreneurs can achieve a positions within the community, and could bring about managerial implications that the informant would be able to teach in her executive training workshops.

Little did she know that I already knew that story. In fact, three important elements were missing from her account. Aside from Guylaine and M. Colpeyn, three other people had been present: Mme. Colpeyn, D'Artagnan, and myself.

The plan was for me to interview Louis, while Guylaine translated for me. We walked up to the bar, as we would have to anyway, to pay for the coffee we had consumed (for which Guylaine insisted on paying). At the bar, a regular with long black hair and a goatee, not unlike the classic image of a musketeer, was enjoying a beer and talking with who I thought was the waitress. I explained in my poor French that I was a researcher interested in studying relationships in Combrayville, and that I wanted to interview Louis. I told the habitué that he was welcome to join in if he wanted, and he said he didn't know anything, that he didn't know these people, and that he was only drinking a beer. The young woman called Louis over, and soon we were engaged in a conversation, the four of us, with d'Artagnan piping in occasionally as a fifth participant.

The French now was much more difficult to follow than during my conversation with Guylaine. Now that I was outnumbered, one foreigner to three or four French people, they spoke quickly and in the comfort of the local accents and turns of phrases. Though Louis was smiling like someone who is running a business is supposed to, he kept a hand on his hip and swung a rag over his shoulder, leaning in at times and beginning to raise his voice. The waitress, who I quickly learned was Louis' wife, Fabienne, seemed to weigh in more directly, also keeping a hand on her hip and gesturing widely with her other hand. Although the young woman had been kindly and attentive before, she now spoke with a strong, deep voice, like peals of thunder.

Somewhere between and around relationships is a difficult place which is compelled to be overcome through some form of action. As the villagers I spoke with described their town, most of them emphasized a divide among the inhabitants that was difficult to overcome. However, there was little consensus regarding the nature of the difficult difference. From one I was told of a difference between the original agricultural inhabitants and the cosmopolitan newcomers, from another I was told of a class struggle between affluent and working class citizens, while still from

another I was told of a generational distance. One of them even situated the difference being between tourists and locals, which placed all the other categories here cited in one single category, that of citizens of Combrayville. Each person, however, was in the middle of these divides, many times in a comfortable place where the difference did not impinge on them. For example, Camille, a middle-aged woman who does not have small children, talked of a generational divide; M. & Mme. Colpeyn work at the "Le Café Est Ici" that greets most of the tourists. This placed each one in a position of reconciliation between these divides, a reconciliation for which each of them advocated and seemed to be struggling to facilitate. Being "special", in these cases, meant that they were not categorized in either side, but were rather in both and neither side. This echoes throughout the social space. Combrayville is a village that is neither purely rural, nor fully urban; the *bobos* have alternative ideas which are neither coherent with those present in this place, yet they insist on implementation here; the town grocer runs a business while often refusing service; frustration and achievement co-exist. Table 1 presents main characteristics of the protagonists in the ethnographic account, that is, what makes them "special", as well as their understanding of the divide in the town.

While they were content to describe their breaks from the expectation to solely interact on basis of their commonalities, the people with whom I interacted at times referred to people they found difficult because of differing opinions and harsh interaction. Because the village is small—for example, there is only one grocer; for example, the café and La Salle de les Gamelans are on opposite sides of the main square—difficult interaction is imposed, and challenging situations abound. It was clear that these villagers still thrived as they went about their business, still seeing themselves on a forward-moving trajectory, a narrative that served as a "buffer" for the frustration they experienced in these imposed relationships (Gerbasi, Porath, Parker, Spreitzer, & Cross, 2015). As they felt they still had a reservoir of energy, they used political skills, or "heart and mind cleverness" in Guylaine's words, to interact with each other and slowly build solutions that were jointly beneficial. Political skills diminish ambiguity in the relationship, which allows the actors to

Table 5.1 – Characteristics of the actors

	Sean	D'Artagnan	Robert	Camille	Guyline	Mr. & Mrs. Colpeyn
Origin	From outside of France	From Flodoard	From other region in France	From other region in France	From a mountainous region similar to Combrayville	Grew up in Combrayville
Habitation	Lives in Flodoard	Has lived few years in Combrayville	Has lived few years in Combrayville	Has lived few years in Combrayville	From a town that is both French and German	Have always lived in Combrayville
Occupation	Works in Flodoard	Works in Combrayville	Works in Flodoard	Works in Combrayville and Flodoard	Works in Combrayville	Work in Combrayville
Relationship with large corporations	Avoided career in large corporations		Has an office job	Quit office job	Quit office job	
Profession	Works in a university, used to work with conselling and education	Works with community service	Works with a large corporation	Independent service provider	Is creating her own professional position in a community service	Manages their own business at the service of the community
Relationship with La Salle	Researcher in Combrayville, access through La Salle	Not involved with La Salle	Volunteer at La Salle	Volunteer at La Salle	Employee of La Salle (President)	Not a volunteer at La Salle (became a distributor)
Motivation in case	Motivated to investigate accounts of Combrayville's relational context		Motivated to build the community	Motivated to build the community	Motivated to build the community	Motivated to build the community

Level of education	Holds an advanced degree	?	Holds an advanced degree	Holds an advanced degree	Holds an advanced degree	?
Representation of the divide	People in Combrayville vs. Complete oblivious outsiders	Cosmopolitan newcomers vs. Local labourers	Disconnected vs. Connected villagers	Young vs. Old <hr/> Positive thinkers vs. Negative thinkers	Optimistic sharers vs. Defensive owners	Combrayville-ians vs. <hr/> Outsiders (Tourists?) <hr/> People that preserve Combrayville's logic vs. Hasty, disruptive people
Position within the divide	A force of imbalance in an impasse between Guylaine and the Colpeyns	Feels he is in the middle of the divide, works as an informal mediator of sorts so people will genuinely say "hi"	Feels he can work against pulverization	Feels she is part of an effort to bridge the divide	Feels she can work against pulverization—but knows her solution is causing unrest and is at risk of increasing the divide	See their business as a means to bring the community together, concerned about similar efforts which can disrupt <hr/> Friends have been leaving Combrayville—can't afford to stay
Understanding of La Salle	Uncertain about what La Salle is	Uncertain about what La Salle is	La Salle exists to bring people together <hr/> La Salle has a pedagogical function for children <hr/> La Salle will motivate interaction among adults	La Salle exists to propogate and share interests <hr/> La Salle exists to bring together associations ("meta-association")	La Salle exists to bring people's talents together and at the disposal of the everyone else.	La Salle is a way to bring people from outside into Combrayville

Means of involvement with people	Uses LinkedIn to be able to recognize people by face	Knows people by name, engages in conversation with strangers	Invites new people to engage and then later to propose their role	Believes in the power of information to generate reality	Believes in the power of intention and willpower	Engage with strangers to do business, "play along"
Attitude towards project, leadership				"Evangelist" of the sharing economy <hr/> Values "push" leadership, where a leader allows people to build their own projects and gives the conditions to go forward	"Evangelist" of the sharing economy <hr/> Believes projects exists for the sake of a "shared journey", and not for the final product <i>per se</i>	
Attitude towards town setting	Background in large urban centers—anticipation of violence, distrust of public transportation			An "evangelist" for the way of life in Combrayville	Both unrestful in Combrayville and unsatisfied with urban hustle and bustle	
Style of communication	Attempt to capture exact meanings of words as employed in context, uses recordings	Playful with words		Values open communication and creativity	Values open communication and creativity <hr/> Care for exact use of words	Gauge how forthcoming they will be on their positions: at times cordial and accommodating, at times direct

experience the forward-moving sensation (Collins, 1981, 1989). Tables 2 and 3 describe the commonalities and mismatches that arose throughout the ethnographic account. Table 4 presents the structural disjoints.

Combrayville imposes a theoretical stand-off: physical proximity (shared place) among actors in the small village imposes that villagers share social foci around which they organize their routines, but they lack the cultural similarities which would make interactions easier. This is most striking in the issue between Guylaine and M. & Mme. Colpeyn: they share a space, and they share a cultural background, but this is a trigger for conflict. Can they allow dissimilarity to keep them apart, or does their shared affiliation to Combrayville bring them together?

While the people with whom I interacted in Combrayville moved to this village to escape the pressures of urban centers and the erosion on their personal life in the corporate environment, they did not accept the comforts of seclusion. Rather, their sense of thriving seems to hinge on exposing themselves to these difficult relationships, exposing even their own eccentricities. At La Salle de les Gamelans, they are even reproducing an environment of co-habitation that sets itself against the "seclusion" in home-offices, inviting creation of shared projects. In Table 6, I propose a typology of reactions to situations. It is important to emphasize that the experience of being before something "special" is only loosely related to the so-called "objective" reality of the intentions and characteristics of the actors. The emphasis is on the experience and how this experience is dealt with cognitively and behaviorally. For example, it is not relevant to what extent Camille was disappointed that I drank black tea instead of green tea. Rather, the experience, though fleeting, was that *something* was amiss.

Situations are where mismatch across the network and throughout the relationships converge. Meanings, including those surrounding the relationship of social space and place, are necessarily shaken up by the emergence of situations (Berglund et al., 2016). This happens because communities have their own established narratives, expectations, cultures as firmly established links among meanings and the presence of a strange element throws it off balance. The novel

Table 5.2 – Examples of commonalities among actors

Sean	D'Artagnan	Robert	Camille	Guylaine	Mr. & Mrs. Colpeyn
<p>With D'Artagnan: Language Common nickname Shared jargon emerging from conversation, that is, use of the word "special"</p> <p>With Camille: Common career activities, Belief (in different degrees) in sharing economy, positive thinking, International experience as a theme</p> <p>With Guylaine: similar language base (latin)</p> <p>With M. & Mme. Colpeyn: similar ages, we both are raising sons</p>	<p>With "newcomers": avoids interaction with local businesses, is a "newcomer", himself.</p> <p>With outsiders of La Salle: uncertain what it is, investigates by spreading rumours</p> <p>With bus driver: is a musician</p> <p>With M. & Mme. Colpeyn: drinks at the café</p>	<p>With Sean: Common interest in space enabling networks for social capital (speaking the "same language")</p> <p>With ethnographer: Shared work location (neighborhood)</p>	<p>With neighbor: works in both Combrayville and Flodoard, interest in buying local</p> <p>With Guylaine: interest in building the community, "positive" thinking as a method</p> <p>With other members of the Combrayville community: interest in alternative spiritual practices, for example, hangs Tibetan flags outside house</p>	<p>With Robert: interest in bringing the community together, in getting her a motivating job</p> <p>With M. & Mme. Colpeyn: Interest in bringing the community together, in distributing the beer from La Salle's brewery, grew up in a small town in the mountains</p>	<p>With ethnographer: A business relationship, since the ethnographer is a tourist and uses the café to work.</p> <p>With Guylaine: businesses share same location</p>

Table 5.3 – Examples of mismatch between actors (cultural)

Sean	D'Artagnan	Robert	Camille	Guyline	Mr. & Mrs. Colpeyn
<p>With D'Artagnan: No shared functional interests</p> <p>With Robert: Sean expects to have much difficulty in securing access</p> <p>Sean doesn't understand role with La Salle, doesn't understand the challenges</p> <p>With Camille: Sean drinks black tea. Camille drinks green tea. Sean thinks the negotiation with the café was marked by conflict and frustration</p> <p>Sean has nihilistic tendency which appears as skepticism—not "positive"</p> <p>With Guyline: difficulty with language</p> <p>Hope that she would use her personal philosophy as a reference to overcome social difficulties</p>	<p>With Sean: strangers</p> <p>With the local workers: they are gruff, he is cordial, might avoid getting involved with conflict.</p> <p>With the "newcomers": They seem somewhat "elitist"</p>	<p>With Sean: Robert expects to have to place difficulty in bringing the ethnographer as a volunteer</p> <p>Robert encourages to jump in and find space</p>	<p>With Sean: Camille thinks the conflict with the bar was resolved through creative and open communication</p> <p>Camille is a social constructivist with new-age philosophy</p> <p>With fellow team member in La Salle: He is not positive. She, as well as the rest, are positive. They impose "positiveness".</p> <p>With neighbor: where to spend vacations? Why leave Combrayville?</p>	<p>With Mr. And Mrs. Colpeyn: wants to be a force of change</p> <p>Thinks that La Salle is not disruptive</p> <p>With the team member: the "journey" of a project is more important than the expected outcome</p> <p>With Camille: wary of being called <i>bobo</i>, while Camille embraces the term.</p>	<p>With Guyline: want to keep things as they are, while expanding</p> <p>Think that La Salle is disruptive</p> <p>With Sean: Sean is an outsider, tourist, and occasionally uses the café as a patron.</p> <p>Ethnographer is probably in league with La Salle.</p>

Table 5.4 – Examples of disjoint among actors (structural)

Sean	D'Artagnan	Robert	Camille	Guylaine	Mr. & Mrs. Colpeyne
<p>Stranded during my last hour in Combrayville, cut off from things needing doing</p> <p>Concerned with hurdles I would have to go through to convince Robert to grant me access Never seen the informants before, yet expected to recognize them Hindered communication for lack of knowledge of French Excluded from the conversation in French Does not know anyone at Combrayville, while looking for access to a field for performing an ethnography (initial position)</p>	<p>Claims he does not know these people, that he is only drinking beers</p> <p>The grocer is unavailable, working on his own "special" time</p> <p>Sense that everything is not well, although everyone says "hi".</p>	<p>Sees there are skills and resources present in Combrayville, but these are disconnected.</p>	<p>Sees that newcomers can find their own disconnected niches</p> <p>There is a risk of losing a team member</p>	<p>Hindered communication with the ethnographer</p> <p>There is a risk of losing a team member</p> <p>The owner of the café does not exchange words with her, after a half-hour rant</p>	<p>People used to come to the café, but now, due to gentrification or aging, the habitués are much less frequent Confronted with a stranger, the anonymous ethnographer, to shift the balance and provoke a conversation</p>

element invites estrangement and resistance¹⁹. Communities are rife with situations that unfold from mismatch arising in the ambiguities of relationships. This is not just a reconfiguring of the social structure, but also a deeply experienced reconfiguring of the agent's position, as something is felt to be "off", possibly even offending (Schuetz [sic], 1944). Table 5 summarizes the situations described in the ethnographic account.

The extent to which being "special" is potentially present in the encounter can be probed by initiating a conversation with an actor. By probing, elements are presented, against which the receiving actor will present herself as more or less "special". The actors in question can then assess the situation by positioning themselves within delimited camps which capture the experience of being "special". Alliances can be proposed and new language created to invite the actors into these camps. This also involves selective attention, as the actors support or refrain from supporting with the sense that they are faced with eccentricities. Actors can then emphasize, be it to each other, to themselves, or to outside parties what qualities are shared. A simple example is a tense, conflictive situation that I was swept into. The co-working space founder took me as a mediator between herself and the owners of Le Café est Ici, M. & Mme. Colpeyn. Even though they were faced with a tense, uncomfortable situation, M. & Mme. Colpeyn would selectively smile and play along with the conversation, inviting the interaction to move forward, as if to signal that, although mutually exclusive interests are at play, "we" were all part of the local community.

¹⁹ « Mais, très fréquemment, le reproche de loyauté ambiguë trouve sa source dans l'étonnement des membres internes du groupe de voir que l'étranger n'accepte pas en bloc leur modèle culturel comme la manière de vivre la plus naturelle et appropriée, comme la meilleure des solutions possibles à tous ses problèmes. On qualifie alors l'étranger d'ingrat, dans la mesure où il refuse de reconnaître que le modèle culturel qu'on lui propose lui procure asile et protection. Mais le gens que le traitent ainsi ne s'aperçoivent pas que, au cours de sa phase de transition, l'étranger ne considère pas du tout ce modèle comme un asile protecteur, mais bien plutôt comme un labyrinthe dans lequel il a perdu tout sens de l'orientation. » (Schütz, 2014 [1943])

Table 5.5 – Situations faced by the actors

Sean	D'Artagnan	Robert	Camille	Guylaine	Mr. & Mrs. Colpeyne
<p>Need to do enter a field for an ethnography assignment</p> <p>Confronted with a bucolic setting, opposite of hectic urban background</p> <p>Meets a stranger at the busstop</p>	<p>Sequestered into the tense relationship between Guylaine and Mr. & Mrs. Colpeyne</p> <p>Meets the stranger at the bus stop</p> <p>Is the grocery store open or not? Is he avoiding the local business?</p> <p>Hears unreliable rumours</p>	<p>Receives e-mails of interest from the ethnographer and is in close proximity to the building where the ethnographer works</p> <p>Has funds that need to be spent in the community's interest</p>	<p>Receiving the ethnographer in her home</p> <p>Choosing a place to go on vacation</p> <p>Opportunity: the routine around the Transeamus</p> <p>Resolving misunderstanding (NOT a resistance, sic) Colleague is not a positive person</p>	<p>Discussing her project with the ethnographer</p> <p>Enduring a tense relationship with Mr. & Mrs. Colpeyne</p> <p>Bringing the ethnographer into this tense relationship</p> <p>Handling someone on the team that is at cross purposes with them</p>	<p>The people in the town are less and less involved with the café</p> <p>Confronted with the competing entrepreneurial project</p> <p>Confronted with an anonymous ethnographer alongside their competition</p>

5.4 DISCUSSION

5.4.1 A theory of situated positions

Having established that they are indeed up against something "special", actors establish and communicate their claim for their own position within the community. This effort is the actor's action to hold on to a clear position (White, 2008) that opens up within the challenging ambiguity associated with situations. As such, I call the effort to situate one's self in the new position "planting", which, alongside the botanical meaning of placing in the ground, also refers to placing an object, such as one's foot, firmly in place.²⁰

In "planting", the situation at hand calls to mind the actor's stock of meanings in the form of history, such as Guylaine and Camille's detailed exposition of their career trajectory or my own "triggered" memories through gustative sensation. The "special" situation brings to the forefront one's own content, no matter how neglected until that moment, in a somewhat "Proustian" manner. The actor establishes their "center", what they "are about". While this can seem self-centered on the actor's part as it brings attention towards the actor's own set of meanings, it can serve as a basis for negotiation, thereby enabling interaction. These "planting" efforts entrench the actor within one's own particular ground, both consolidating their own identity (Berglund et al., 2016) and inviting (or imposing) conversion of their partner in the relationship. In this way, encounters with others throughout the community force difficult, disruptive meanings to arise that will have to be dealt with in new shared narratives (Duymedjian et al., 2019). Such a basis is most clear in M. Colpeyn's insistence on being a naysayer: by remaining firm in his position, he encouraged adaptation of surrounding actors to his own interests and needs and maintaining a foothold in the community. If there is no conversion, an actor can still resort to Time, declaring hope that, in Time, conversion to their own position will happen.

Actors also attempt to articulate coalitions that are at hand through these boundaries which are experienced when they are up against something "special". "Articulating" is an effort to

²⁰ Incidentally, the term "Planter" in French holds a similar meaning.

organize the actions of surrounding actors around similar foci in an attempt to enlist and secure their efforts. While “planting” establishes the “center” of the actor’s actions, “articulating” establishes the extent to which their actions reach, emphasizing potential overlaps with partners’ domains of influence. In other words, their “special” (eccentric) orientations can find common ground upon which the relationship can thrive.

How *do* actors who are caught up in entrepreneurial action operate culture to achieve and embrace their position in the entrepreneurial process? I submit that they rise to the challenges of situations of mismatch and disjoint in their community by planting and articulating. “Planting” captures the cultural domain in interaction inasmuch as it attempts to grasp the meanings, or “sets of [symbolic] resources” (Lounsbury et al., 2019: 1216; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001: 549), that are operated to resolve the ambiguity at hand. Culture frames, navigates, problematizes through links among meanings, and establishes footholds in situated positions that solve mismatch in relationships. “Articulating” refers to attempts at altering/preserving the structural setting of relationships, establishing who is connected to whom. Because these are intimately connected in interaction (Duymedjian et al., 2019), planting and articulating are two sides of the same coin, that of *situated positions*. I refer to *situated positions* as actor’s placement among relationships between actors (position), problematized by these high-stakes episodes (situations). My reference to situated positions is an exercise in articulating the language of netdoms (White, 2008).

Planting and articulating requires cumbersome work—for example, “making” the team member “be positive”, confronting the grocer, helping the scholar to get involved with the project. As for myself, experiencing it together with the people of Combrayville was at best awkward, and at worse bordering on humiliating. However, from these encounters, when fueled by our own eccentricity, as it arose from each person’s particularity, we could contribute to the situation in a way that brought imbalance to the current state of affairs. I present in Table 6 a preliminary typology of strategies to obtain situated positions, as described in the ethnographic account. This has no intention to be a full, exhaustive list, as the objective of this paper is to emphasize the relational challenges inherent to the entrepreneurial process.

I contest that operating culture is not so much about doing skillful deployment of meanings because a “good” skill would be overly embedded in a group’s expectations of what is well done, thereby avoiding the benefits and difficulties of autonomy and missing the element of being distinct and well (Littman-Ovadia, 2019). Rather, this literature’s effort to draw attention to strategic action, that is, articulating meanings to operate culture (Küpers et al., 2013; Lounsbury et al., 2019; Quinn & Dutton, 2005), is first and foremost about establishing the energizing qualities of the co-created narratives as they enable or impede actors’ actions in strange situations (Schuetz [sic], 1944). Given that actors are striving with and against each other to overcome ambiguities and mismatch within situations, such “skillful” operation should, at this point, clearly be seen as intensely problematic as actors play out the process of entrepreneurship in their community (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2018; Munro, 2018; Vestrum, 2014). Here, since we are in the realm of life-worlds (Schütz & Luckmann, 1974), it should be clear that “skillful” operation is a matter of being positioned in a social space as a situation unfolds and finding some sort—any sort—of planting by articulating meanings related to their relational positions (Berglund et al., 2016; Littman-Ovadia, 2019; see Jones, Hesterly, & Borgatti, 1997).

Emblematic of such dynamic was the encounter at *Le Café Est Ici*. At Guylaine’s suggestion, we met at a location which entailed a certain dynamic of the relationships. Both sides, that of the Colpeyn couple and that of Guylaine, had been quite clear. My entrance in their dynamic—the addition of one more node and its potential ties, complete with both a linguistic as well as a conversational barrier—disrupted the equilibrium to which they were accustomed. As a researcher, I could ask simple questions which would allow them to renegotiate their established routines and change the way relationships around them worked. In the space among our eccentricities, even in the midst of the three institutions that were represented there (*Le Café Est Ici*, *La Salle de les Gamelans*, the research institution), a conversation ensued, and it was markedly not a civil negotiation. It was a tenuous, even clumsy fumbling on all sides as we—myself included—

Table 5.6 – Typology of situated positioning strategies

Situated position	Example from the full ethnographic account
Naming alliances	“D’Artagnan called to his friend, the bus driver, and said that ‘his colleague’ would like to get off the bus. I felt flattered he didn’t just call me ‘this guy’, though recognizing the casual way in which the French use the term ‘colleague’.”
Proposing and Employing of words	<p>“You are ‘special!’”</p> <p>Various struggle around poor English and French skills.</p> <p>“I did not understand what she meant with ‘positive’. ‘We have all positive thinking, so everything is coming as we want,’ she went on to explain. ‘We don’t have any doubt, we believe it will work. It’s what I teach as a coach. Everything is energy. You give an information, and it becomes hard.’ The tea spoons clinked in the cups as she tapped the coffee table. ‘Your thoughts are the same: you give the information, and it materializes.’”</p> <p>“She wished that Louis would understand that they were ‘in different gardens’, and that they would clearly not interfere with each other, as she saw it.”</p>
Negotiating understanding	<p>“At one moment, we had to pause the conversation so she could explain to me what a particular key word meant. She started to give an elaborate definition of the term. The conclusion: the French word /kəwəʁkiŋ/ (‘co-working’), corresponded to the English word /'kɒw'wɜ:kɪŋ/ (‘co-working’).”</p> <p>“We could meet, if not halfway, at least in ‘proximate territory’.”</p>
Emphasizing on shared qualities	<p>“They felt that we were speaking the same language.”</p> <p>I asked, in my best, heavily accented French, if I could step up behind the bar and stand with them: “<i>je peux?</i>”, followed by a gesture for “walking over there”. They laughed good-humoredly (was this professional affability or amusement?), and gestured that I was welcome. From behind the bar, now there were three people looking down at Guylaine. I asked her “<i>que ’st que-ce que La Salle de les Gamelans peux fait pour ici?</i>”, an attempt at asking what her project could do for the café.</p> <p>“We nibbled on <i>speculoos</i> cookies, which have a somewhat Proustian effect on me, invoking the grey and red graffiti-ridden subways of my childhood.”</p>
Negotiating understanding Filtering (selective attention)	<p>“Mme. Colpeyn brought their small one-year-old in from daycare. M. Colpeyn carried him around his establishment, juggling time with his offspring and family with managing his work, and smiled a big, proud smile. I knew that smile well. I played the same way with my own one-year-old son and smiled just as proud.”</p> <p>“We drank tea: she, green, I, black (which, from what I could gather from a fleeting look across her face, seemed a slight disappointment to her).”</p>
Appeal to a trend	“The world is entering a new economy, the sharing economy. The individualistic society is through.”
Appeal to values systems	<p>“There was a pink Himalayan salt crystal lamp on the shelf against the wall behind her. From my vantage point during our conversation, it seemed to perch on her shoulder. To the left, just out of my sight, a painting with mandalas representing chakras loomed beside the large window. I mentioned to her that I had noticed a man-sized Buddha on the porch of a house on my way up the mountain.”</p> <p>“‘I think people here are more open minded,’ she told to me. ‘In one way, we say we are... do you know <i>bobo</i>, what it means?²¹ It’s a people who want to live different in society. They are a little bit richer, they eat organic food. [...] We are more like that, it’s true.’”</p>

²¹ “Bobo”, in Portuguese, means “silly” when referring to things and “dummy” when referring to people.

Planting	Appeal to doctrine	"When [the differences] all come together, they are an ecosystem. The village is like the world. It's a great challenge to see the person as <i>gens</i> ."
	Appeal to urgency	"Now she spoke with a strong, deep voice, like peals of thunder."
	Appeal to tradition	"The first place to go is the church and the café. Six families frequented the place."
	Appeal to benefits	"She claimed the project would bring more villagers downtown, which meant the café would have more business."
	Appeal to limitation of resources	"They said they didn't have the time to help out, because managing the restaurant took so much of their own time."
	Appeal to tradition	"The first place to go is the church and the café. Six families frequented the place."
	Appeal to time (seems a last resort)	"She simply stated that rumors and resistance would only be dispelled once more projects rolled out and became part of the village's routine."
Articulating	Isolating	Ethnographer's account of melting snow
	Avoiding	Buying groceries in the city instead of at the local grocery, where the owner is a gruff, "special", person.
	Probing	"He approached me and asked about my day."
	Add a tie	"I asked, in my best heavily accented French, if I could step up behind the bar and stand with them."
	Invoke the ties	"I asked how they relate to this special person on their team. 'We say to him, "no! You must <i>think positive!</i> " And we <i>make</i> him be positive!'"
	Seeing a person as part of a coalition	"When talking about this, she argued with me, although I had said nothing to the contrary."
	Peace offering—joined activities, acknowledging and validating others' situated position	"I returned alone to the café for a beer."
	Invitation to commiserate	"She continued to speak French with me, and vented her frustration with the people at the café."
	Dodging	"I turned and asked, 'What's going on here?', a question he did not answer. Rather, he excused himself, 'I don't know these people, I don't know this place.'"
Changing roles	"I felt myself 'slip' out of my role as a researcher, and into one that was of greater ease for myself."	

struggled to get a handle on the situation by articulating whatever means seemed half-appropriate that we could bring to the table. Throughout such a process, actors can dodge the issues, or find themselves changing sides and roles according to the shifts in the situation at hand (Mische & White, 1998). In the end, it would seem that it was satisfactory for all parties—La Salle de les Gamelans gained a little more goodwill and partnership, Le Café Est Ici got a verbal promise that territory would be respected and would be able to sell another product at very low cost, and I got my data—this achieved at emotional expense, switching of roles and gauging of expectations. These outcomes were expressed both as celebration and assessment of loss, closing the process of being up against something “special”.

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter is an invitation to find a simple truth claim through a detour in thick description. A long tradition of literature draws forth the childish wonder²² of the stranger, exploring a new world (Schuetz [sic], 1944), such as Herman Melville’s (1846) *Typee*, or even fictionalized parodies such as Michael Chrichton’s (1976) *Eaters of the Dead: The Manuscript of Ibn Fadlan Relating His Experiences with the Northmen in A.D. 922* and Johnathan Swift’s (1726) *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Ships* (Germain & Laifi, 2018). The present paper could be read as a phenomenon lengthily discussed in theoretical terms, articulating a conceptual discussion of implications of theories, their axioms, and how a few distinct constructs imply certain outcomes. This version of the paper is peppered with some few elements drawn from the empirical ethnographic observation. For the reader who seeks the simple theoretical contribution, it is as follows.

Truth claim (structural-cultural emphasis): The operation of culture is situated within a social structure, that is, an actor assumes a “special” position within a network of relationships; experiencing this position as “special” enhances a distinct, personal, *difficult*

²² Unskilled!

configuration, that is, a situation, that is played out as a public reconciliation of distinct cultures.

This truth claim is grounded upon the backdrop of situated agency (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), that is, that:

This network of relationships stems from the imposition of community life, where a node's agency is intimately situated within the vibrant surrounding ties, as opposed to resting in complete isolation as a distinct node with no ties.

The truth claim has been framed around situated positions to emphasize that the phenomenon is grounded in embodied relationships among actual people who are in a shared social space, acting around their social foci. However, we can also flip this truth claim around, drawing attention to the entrepreneurial process, composed of a string of resolved situations (Garud et al., 2017; Garud, Tuertscher, & Van de Ven, 2013). From this perspective, planting actors advance the entrepreneurial process as they resolve the situation by entering new cultural and relational configurations. This opens the space for new challenging situations to emerge and guide the entrepreneurial process further along.

Modified truth claim (attention to the entrepreneurial process): operating culture advances the entrepreneurial process because it resolves situations that are positioned within a social structure. That is, actors assume a "special" position that emerges within a network of relationships as they come up against distinct, personal, *difficult* cultural challenges. These situated positions reconfigure situations into new opportunities for advancing the entrepreneurial process.

A purely conceptual discussion would hide the fact that this is drawn from a real life-world experience—my own socially situated experience—of being in the community. Ironically, the section that presents the greatest leaps in acquiring knowledge through the chosen scientific method, that is, literary ethnographic description (Crapanzano, 1986; Fleckenstein, 1999; Germain & Laifi, 2018), has had to be presented through excerpts instead of its full totality.

Through an exercise in relational ethnography (Desmond, 2014), the account trades the theoretical discussion for description of actors' life-world (Schütz, 1970; Schütz & Luckmann, 1974), where the theoretical truth claim cuts across like a regressed line that sports a small adjusted R^2 . I have provided here a theoretically imperfect story, folded into descriptive language, as if in flour, egg, and sugar, that allows reflection on a phenomenon to rise, as hopefully will happen as this is presented in conferences, passage through a review process, and perhaps the occasional citation. Much like the actions performed by protagonists of the entrepreneurship process in Combrayville, this chapter is an exercise in resolving a "special" position, situated upon the edge of a boundary (Hjorth and Reay, 2018; Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, and Le, 2014; Shepherd, 2015; see the discussion around Pfeffer, 1993 and Van Maanen, 1995). But such is the challenge of the cultural operator (Überbacher et al., 2015), placed between two wor(l)ds: As one aspires to become a part of one or the other or the two enjoined, one is also a shadow that pukishly offends by becoming too eccentric.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Rushing In—Affective Bases of Legitimacy Assessments When Rendering Support to Entrepreneurs

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6.0 THE STORY SO FAR...

The present thesis has set out to explore why supporters support entrepreneurs and their projects. Consulting extant literature, I found that there are particular relational structures, that is, networks, that entrepreneurs form around themselves and which are associated with being supported. Simultaneously, I found that extant literature suggests that there are institutional and cultural cues that can signal the legitimacy of entrepreneurs and their projects. However, inspired by extant literature on social support in sociology, I identified that entrepreneurs’ supporters are

almost never directly consulted regarding their experience in giving support, leaving their agency and relational context opaque. In short, extant literature does not shed light on why supporters willingly support entrepreneurs.

Several clues to this end were picked up throughout the reported empirical studies. These were guided by curiosity regarding the relational mechanisms that enable support to entrepreneurs. In chapter III, highlighting specific structures and focusing on a particular form of support, we found that support paths involving peers, be them peers to the entrepreneur or peers to the supporter, were sufficient conditions for supporters to advise entrepreneurs, regardless whether entrepreneurs and third parties interacted with each other. We also found that triads where third parties and entrepreneurs interacted with each other, regardless whether the supporter was a peer or mentor, were sufficient to enable supporters to advise. When observing the narratives of support in these developmental support paths, we found that, underlying these configurations, was the notion that knowledge obtained by supporters had to be translated into a situation faced by the entrepreneur, and that supporters were able to overcome relational barriers between the third party and the entrepreneur that impeded such translation. A clue here is that actors in support relationships shape these networks to enhance their relevance to each other, which confers the supporter a role as advisor and articulator in the wider support network (see Chiambaretto, Massé, & Mirc, 2019).

The following chapter (IV) delved deeper into the stories of support in these support paths, where supporters were placed between an entrepreneur and a third party. We see that they find themselves explicitly emphasizing commonalities amongst themselves. These similarities are experienced as being in similar or the same situations (situational homophily) and as having similar values (value homophily). We see in these accounts that all the actors in question actively emphasize these similarities against a backdrop of tensions in the wider network. These tensions can be experienced as aspirational, where they hope to become a part of this wider network, or antagonistic, where they feel threatened by the pervasive practices throughout the wider network. Supporting an entrepreneur is part of a series of relational practice performed by all the actors in

question—entrepreneurs, supporters, and third parties—practices which enact these similarities and establish a protective shell in the midst of the tensions with the wider network.

In chapter V, I bring this discussion to France, where I explicitly explore how culture is navigated and articulated among actors who are involved in an entrepreneurial process. Here, instead of focusing on particular triads, I get involved with a few actors and their own position in the network. I find that they all are in an effort to understand what the network is about. Each actor is faced with a particularly challenging facet of the situations that the local network experiences. In these disruptive challenges, they situate themselves in their network and find their own positions within the relational structure. These particular situated positions end up exposing their own uniqueness, which they identify as being “special”.

Having established these relational mechanisms around supporting entrepreneur, thereby enriching the structural arguments around explaining support, I have sufficient ground to address the cultural and institutional argument around legitimacy. In the review about this matter in the chapter I, I highlighted that extant literature would lead us to understand that supporters begrudgingly support as they seek entrepreneurs who simply conform to the dictates of established monolithic cultures. However, this contradicts the intuition that support happens willingly (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007), that “fools rush in” (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994: 645). With the above mechanisms around relational structures and the articulation of culture within and throughout relationships, we can now discuss how supporters can enthusiastically judge positively the legitimacy of entrepreneurs and their projects. By exploring how this judgment plays out through these relational mechanisms, we uncover a socio-psychological explanation for enthusiastic support to entrepreneurs.

6.1 TOWARDS AN EXPERIENCE-BASED JUDGEMENT OF LEGITIMACY

To theorize about why a supporter would engage with an entrepreneur, we posit that the reasons for assessing legitimacy positively and, hence, engaging with the entrepreneur by

supporting their project, are predominantly rooted in the experience of the relationship with the entrepreneur (for example, Cardon, Post, & Forster, 2017; Huang & Knight, 2017; Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2014). Here, we explore one mechanism that can account for such differences among supporters, claiming that the terms for such a positive evaluation are set within the supporter's relationship with the entrepreneur, where an entrepreneur offers a potential supporter the opportunity to engage with their project by rendering support. In the backdrop, we follow a discussion on the relationship of agents with institutional logics (for example, Cardinale, 2019; Hwang & Colyvas, 2020; Voronov & Weber, 2017), contributing with the more concrete phenomenon of why support rendered to entrepreneurs makes sense to those who render it (Ployhart & Bartunek, 2019). We feel that this discussion is ready to be drawn into the complexities of legitimacy assessments.

We turn to the insights of the affect theory of social exchange for an experientially driven mechanism that could explain this phenomenon (Lawler, 2001; Lawler, Thye, & Yoon, 2008; Totterdell, Wall, Holman, Diamond, & Epitropaki, 2004). Affect has been posited to hold a central role in the entrepreneurial process and our investigation of the experience of support through support paths has lead us right straight into its realm (Goss, 2010; Goss & Sadler-Smith, 2018; Nielsen, 2019). The affect theory of social exchange places affect at the heart of exchange relationships, mapping out how types of exchange are associated with diverse affective experiences.

Drawing from advances of the affect theory of social exchange in organizational psychology (for example, Brown, Arnold, Fletcher, & Standage, 2017; Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005), we suggest that supporters are attracted to opportunities that generate the expectation of *thriving*, which is a joint experience of learning and vitality within the challenges and opportunities presented in a given social context (Porath et al., 2012). Such a mechanism, though pre-conscious, should be seen as a basis for, and not an alternative to, more so-called "rational" evaluative processes (Cardinale, 2018; Fisher, Kotha, & Lahiri, 2016; Lok, Creed,

DeJordy, & Voronov, 2017; Lounsbury, 2008; see also Forgas & George, 2001). We discuss how the relationship between an entrepreneur and a potential supporter provides conditions in which the supporter, to re-use the words popularized by Elvis Presley (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994), “can’t help falling in love” with the entrepreneur’s project and “rush in”, culminating in a generalized sense that their own support for a given project is, in fact, legitimate. Rather than discuss in more general terms how legitimacy assessments are made, we ground our investigation in the phenomenon of potential supporters pondering the possibility of rendering support to entrepreneurs, thereby striving for a theory that is also practical (Ployhart & Bartunek, 2019).

We continue the discussion about support to entrepreneurs with an overview of the challenges involved in assessing the legitimacy of an entrepreneur’s project, and how these assessments are just as much rational and cognitive as they are pre-conscious and affective, and set within a larger social framework that vies within and against given social expectations. We then discuss how a potential supporter, as an actor within this system, is pressured by social expectations and enabled by social opportunities. We explore and illustrate this point by discussing resolution of the dilemma between fitting in and standing out in the process of innovation which is inherent in entrepreneurship projects (for example, de Clercq & Voronov, 2009; O’Neil and Ucbasaran, 2016). Here, we suggest that the supporter seeks to relieve these pressures by engaging with other actors, ultimately building a setting where they can have an overall experience of thriving. Hence, their attention is then shifted from the legitimacy of the entrepreneur’s project to the legitimacy of the support they render to this project. We conclude by showing that this shift in the object of their assessment emphasizes the affective potential of the experience, and introduces a non-cognitive, non-rational, and relationally-focused component in their assessment of the entrepreneur’s project that is rooted in the experience of their own network.

6.1.1 Entrepreneurs' relational practices to secure legitimacy

Extant literature describes entrepreneurs' practices through which legitimacy is signaled. They "argue" for the legitimacy of their project through linguistic mechanisms, positioning the project against the extant businesses in the marketplace (van Werven, Bouwmeester, & Cornelissen, 2015). For example, Zott and Huy (2007) describe how entrepreneurs call upon symbolic cues that are unique to a certain population to show that they conform to their dictates and practices, such as wearing particular clothes and using certain words. Extant literature exploring the relational strategies have shown such relational practices as networking to build legitimacy (Daudigeos, 2013), articulation of symbols to signal fit with diverse audiences (Zott & Huy, 2007), storytelling (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001), use of analogies and metaphors (Überbacher et al., 2015), and efforts towards impression management (Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Überbacher, 2014), just to name a few. Even as far back as the seminal paper by Walker, Henry, Thomas, and Zelditch Jr. (1986), relational bases for legitimacy have been identified, where the legitimacy of the actor performing an act and the position the actor occupies in the network is a main pillar for the assessment that is made regarding their legitimacy.

Actions are agentic, in the sense that these interact with the position supporters and entrepreneurs occupy within a network in order to gain a new position in the social structure, entertaining new configurations in their relationships (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Lok & Willmott, 2019; Powell & Oberg, 2017). Tornikoski and Newbert (2007) show that it is the actions taken by the entrepreneur which play a key role in building legitimacy. Examples that Tornikoski and Newbert provide for this are "marketing efforts, projected financial statements, opened bank account, and listed in the phone book" (pg. 328) and "improvising behavior"—all of which portray the semblance of an operational business. These behaviors place the entrepreneur in a certain position within the surrounding network, and make certain flows of resources and information possible. Do note that in Tornikoski and Newbert (2007) there is limited evidence for networking

activities on gaining legitimacy that leads to new venture emergence, since this link is not measured directly—the networking activities are assumed to be markers for legitimacy in their own right. In later work (for example, Newbert & Tornikoski, 2012), these authors explored the relationships to unpack how the portfolio of strong and weak ties accrue towards gaining resources, but in these discussions legitimacy is left to the side, and achievement of support becomes a function of the composition of relationships and entrepreneurs’ practices to establish a network position among these. The intuition here is that the resource flows are enabled by certain configurations of networks around the entrepreneurs. From the previous discussion on the assessment of legitimacy, however, it should be clear that more is involved around these relationships, that is, how “well” the entrepreneur is positioned in the network according to the potential supporter’s interests, the social cues that are articulated within these relationships against the expectations associated with those positions, and the ease with which conflicts among expectations and logics are overcome by an entrepreneur’s project.

6.2 RELATIONAL LEGITIMACY: THE INTERSUBJECTIVE PROCESS OF EVALUATING LEGITIMACY

We propose that support comes through legitimacy that is grounded in relationships, that is, “relational legitimacy”, which we define as *the evaluation made by actors regarding the appropriateness of another actor’s actions according to the way in which these actions enact the logics emergent from within the relationship and how appropriately it impacts the logics experienced across their other relationships*. Relational legitimacy works because the assessments that potential supporters make regarding the legitimacy of a project are not based on exhaustive, pondered calculations with deep investigation, but are rather fairly quick decisions based on affect and general heuristics (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Fisher et al., 2017; Haack et al., 2014).

Tost (2011: 693) provides grounds for a relational, social foundation for positively evaluating a project’s legitimacy, stating that “legitimacy emerges from the extent to which a social entity

communicates to the individual that he or she is accorded respect, dignity, and status within the group context and through group membership. From a relational perspective, an entity is seen as legitimate when it affirms individuals' social identities and bolsters their sense of self-worth.” Here, the intuition is that the legitimacy of the given actor or association is passed on to the entrepreneur through the potential supporter’s need to “cut corners” in the search for information. In other words, although the liability of newness implies that little information is available, the people with whom the entrepreneur has become associated have done some form of assessment, and because their assessment is deemed trustworthy, their association with the entrepreneur is evidence that the project is, indeed, appropriate and desirable, too. For example, Haack et al. (2014) shows how assessments of transnational governance schemes' were carried out by assessing the network of affiliates associated with the these transnational governance schemes, because they are difficult to evaluate directly. This assessment was relationally grounded, following the affect experienced within these relationships. This is especially helpful when categorization is difficult to come by.

6.2.1 A phenomenon-driven illustration

Consider the following illustrative case, taken from field work one of the authors did in Brazil with supporters and entrepreneurs. Here, Jonas, a supporter and Magali, an entrepreneur and founder of Echoes²³, describe their relationship. The supporter coordinates a co-working space, where he provides the entrepreneur with physical space (with price reductions and waivers), advice, encouragement, and access to his own network. Throughout the interview, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the current situations in Brazil regarding education, as well as how women are even more severely underserved in this regard. Most importantly, he is impressed by how the entrepreneur addresses these issues directly.

“Brazil is going through an enormous need for people with technical training, we train our technicians very poorly here in Brazil, and what I think they are doing is filling a real

²³ Names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

gap in the market and it has enormous potential. I believe, at least I have a philosophy, that everyone needs to learn programming in school, and that doesn't happen. [...] And Echoes is filling this gap, that we are focusing on a lot, that we want to help out in. [...] Magali is a person who, for a long time, has been involved in the matter of Women Empowerment, she stands out because there are, because she ended up getting, beyond Echoes filling a need in the market, which is a gap in training, Magali herself fills a gap because there are no female programmers. And she is a female programmer and she knew how to use that to build a very rich network around herself."

Echoes, supporter

For this supporter, it is not enough to expose societal problems and to make focused efforts.

Rather, these should be addressed as business opportunities in order to make these efforts sustainable, as he later said he discusses with his own friend and mentor.

"[We talk] about the market, what's going on, the economic crisis, will the crisis get in the way, will it not get in the way, about investments, about investors, what sort of new things we see coming up, what new business models are coming up, and that is always a very broad conversation. We share many ideas. We especially share ideas about Brazil's current state, that is a challenging moment, but where there is also opportunity. We really share the idea about how initiatives like this that we are managing can, uh, can make a huge impact on the ecosystem so, uh, yeah, many [impacts]."

Echoes, supporter

Because Magali's project is in line, not only with what the supporter and his friend consider good practices, but also the correct sort of response to a wider manner that has yet to be introduced as a practice, he feels that he is confident in the entrepreneur, even on a personal level. Note that he does not refer so much to her project, but rather to her. Because of this association with the entrepreneur, he is willing to be flexible on the rules that he manages, and allow entry into the co-working space of a startup that is outside of their usual scope, something that required effort on his part to convince his partners.

"Regarding Echoes specifically, I can say that she asked to do Echoes at our co-working space, we liked it, we thought it was interesting, their objective is really cool, we really trust Magali's work, I really trust in Magali's work, and so we decided to give them our support. [...] It just so happens that Magali's company is one of the companies that is outside of the scope of being a resident at the co-working space because they are a consulting firm-slash-school. Most of the residents are companies that are creating a technology product. And they aren't necessarily creating a product, and so I had to convince all my

partners and everyone of the value she would bring to the space, and we have been quite satisfied.”

Echoes, supporter

Throughout his relationship with the entrepreneur, he drew attention to the energizing experience of relating to her. While he maintained a dispassionate tone throughout the interview and made great effort to avoid speaking in emotional terms, he went to great lengths to address the energy level that he experiences when they relate with each other.

“[...] I like, I think she brings a really, really great energy. You can see in a person’s eyes when they are doing something that they like and is working out, is going forward. So it’s really great, in that sense. [...] I think that’s one of the main features. I think that in every interaction she is always very positive, very joyful. [...] I think the main word is ‘energy’. I think that first of all the entrepreneur has to have energy to make things happen. I get a feeling of energy, I don’t know if there is such a thing, but that’s what I get from being around her.”

Echoes, supporter

The entrepreneur responds to this by acknowledging the importance the supporter has in establishing her position as a game-changer in the field. She strongly emphasized how much he has provoked her and her co-founder to push their own boundaries, to be more ambitious, and to make the project fully functional. Although the project is outside of their scope and rules were bent to include Echoes in the co-working space, the supporter now is fully confident in the decision to support, and showcases the startup to visitors to the co-working space in order to build networks.

“And then today, it’s like, ‘Má, it’s so good that you insisted because it really worked and thank God it did.’ The fact that we see each other every day, that he knocks on our door with a caravan of, like, all the way from the government to some new entrepreneur he believes in, and he gives us the chance to speak with these folks, he increased our network of contacts so much.”

Echoes, entrepreneur

Note that it was not enough for Magali to put together a startup that would conform to the standards expected for participating in the co-working space, but rather that she built the legitimacy

of breaking the rule by engaging with the supporter along the lines that were most significant to him (Daudigeos, 2013). In fact, it was her and her partners' meaningful distinction from the industrial practices at the relational level that emphasized their legitimacy. It facilitated the emphasis on their ability to conform to certain qualities (Zott & Huy, 2007), in this case, as a business practice (instead of an NGO) that is expected to render social returns on their supporters' support, as well as prove in day-to-day practices that they can deliver on the expectations for entrepreneurial and managerial practices. On the other hand, they are able to subvert the expectations and use a consulting/school logic, rather than a product development one, to fully address the supporter's concerns. This resolves the supporter's concerns for the ecosystem and society, relieving these tensions while directing towards action (Quinn & Dutton, 2005). In other words, the potential supporter is relieved of the de-energizing experience and feels excitement, a "rush" (Cardon et al., 2017; Park, 1998).

6.2.2 Relational legitimacy re-energizes supporters by resolving contradictions

To further ground the theoretical discussion in the phenomenon of how supporters experience a rush stemming from resolution of the de-energizing experience of conflicting logics (Ployhart & Bartunek, 2019), we look at an emblematic challenge in evaluating the legitimacy of an entrepreneur's project: fitting in and standing out (de Clercq & Voronov, 2009). Here, the challenge is to introduce novelty within the context of conformity (Navis & Glynn, 2011). The widely-held notion of legitimacy is that the grounds for a firm to be legitimate is mostly in its ability to show that it conforms to shared notions of "desirability" and that legitimizing the distinguishing features is a great challenge (for example, Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Daudigeos, 2013). To build legitimacy, Suchman (1995: 587) states that the entrepreneur must "conform to the dictates of preexisting audiences", "select among multiple environments in support of the right audience that will support current practices", and "manipulate environmental structure by creating new audiences and new

legitimizing beliefs”. The entrepreneur can choose to conform with the objective of achieving legitimacy and from this position then gain a foothold in shaping the environment (DiMaggio, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). For example, Kleinbaum (2012) demonstrated that people who follow prototypical career paths are associated with areas of the network where people mostly are connected with each other, where prominence is established by reflecting the standards and expectations that are held by these common connections. Zimmerman & Zeitz (2002) go as far as to paint a somewhat bleak picture where the pre-conscious, subjective process of evaluating a project’s legitimacy quite consistently falls back into isomorphism, simply reproducing the status quo of what is “generally” considered legitimate.

Conformity, however, is not the only way to gain such a foothold. Kleinbaum (2012) shows that prominence can also be achieved by those who hold atypical career paths. These people most likely bridge between different groups and exploit alternative manners in which legitimacy can be achieved. After all, since some degree of distinctiveness seems to be a necessary feature of new endeavors, the descriptions of these endeavors need only to have the appearance of distinctiveness which is made apparent in the narratives articulated by entrepreneurs—the distinctiveness is self-reported through socially constructed stories (Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983).

Lounsbury and Glynn (2001: 522) suggest that an “optimal distinctiveness” is found by positioning the entrepreneurs’ endeavor against the legitimacy held by the overall industry in which the project takes place, as well as against the size of competence-destroying potential of the project. Aldrich and Fiol (1994) suggest that entrepreneurs should simply disguise the extent of the project’s distinctiveness, enhancing it only to the extent that it demonstrates that the project holds a comparative advantage against other projects in the marketplace. However, this ignores the possibility that entrepreneurs and their supporters might agree on the importance of a given distinctive quality of the project, as it exists at the crossroads of conflicting logics, where they hope to boost an emerging new reference for what is deemed desirable and appropriate. Rather, Bitektine and Haack (2015) describe the move towards greater conformity through isomorphism as a matter

of stability in the ecosystem. The more instability, the more contradictions, the more options that the potential supporters have in their menu of references to call upon, the greater the efforts to synthesize and disregard logics. In matters of contestation, supporters call upon their own understanding of what is acceptable and desirable in the midst of these logics (Tost, 2011) and add to the resolution of the conflict in the ecosystem by endorsing certain projects. Because we are now looking at potential support from supporters with a given project, we see that this does not have to be an overt, public, endorsement that would clearly strengthen a given approach to resolving a conflict, as Bitektine and Haack (2015) suggest.

The answer to finding the optimal balance between distinctiveness and conformity is not to be found when looking at overarching references. Rather, we hold that it is to be found in the interaction between actors within specific contexts (Daudigeos, 2013; Oreg et al., 2018). This way, there is not an “optimal” position between distinctiveness and conformity, but instead an indication that the endeavor is meaningful in ways that are specific to the relationship as it is nested in a given, shared, situation (Groen, 2005; Groen, Wakkee, & De Weerd-Nederhof, 2008).

O’Neil and Ucbasaran (2016) describe a process model of aligning personal values with stakeholders’, where an entrepreneur’s personal values are a means to achieve distinctiveness. Adaptation when entrepreneurs experience push-back from potential supporters helps them to fit in. Shared understanding among actors has been posited as a basis for strategic positioning (Nickerson & Zenger, 2004). This is shaped by each actor’s self-interest and negotiated through the forging of partnerships for knowledge transfer, which builds on the shared language between the actors while they reconcile their divergent beliefs and logics emerge that they can articulate (Dyer & Singh, 1998). This means that throughout the entrepreneur’s network, shifts in the codes and routines are obliged to occur as relationships are added and new challenges arise, to be resolved relationally (Methot et al., 2018; Mische & White, 1998). At the dyadic level, standing out *can* be a way to fit in, by fitting in at a micro level (dyadic) and standing out at another, more macro, level (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). However, the opposite cannot hold: one cannot sustainably “stand out”

(that is, disagree) at the dyadic level and achieve legitimacy, even if this would “fit in” at the macro level, without at least engendering some sort of begrudging experience, such as the supporter who upholds a “generalized” notion of legitimacy as described initially (Jarvis, 2017).

This is the meaning of being a “cultural operator”: that entrepreneurs are able to articulate the symbols that are meaningful to given audiences, and therefore obtain access to positions and resources that enhance their vitality (Überbacher, 2014; Zott & Huy, 2007). Cultural operators articulate different logics for different audiences, selectively decoupling the “difficult” parts that can discourage support (Überbacher et al., 2015). While we know that being a skillful cultural operator is fundamental for entrepreneurs to rally support for their projects, there has been no discussion in extant literature of how potential supporters are faced with challenges of operating around the multiple references that guide how people interact throughout the ecosystem. But if they have a role to perform as supporters that enables their interaction with the wider ecosystem, it stands to reason that they are also faced with the need to exert such a skill. As such, supporters are also cultural operators, but instead of resolving their challenges by creating projects, when they act as supporters they resolve these by engaging with the projects of others.

In the intimacy of relational legitimacy, support can be a quiet, perhaps even covert, interaction that strengthens the entrepreneur’s project, without exposing the supporter to too much risk of retaliation or ostracism and relieving the need to feign their subjective experience (Jarvis, 2017). In fact, when keeping support at a relational level, such subversive interaction can even happen in stable environments, where more covert support is rendered to a project that the supporter feels is a worthy provocation to a stability that they themselves critique as unacceptable, uninteresting, perhaps even bland (Rao, 1998). This would be a direct, albeit covert, attack on the generalized notion that keeps assessments of legitimacy objective and stable (Suchman, 1995), providing grounds for excitement, for experiencing a rush. Here, we see that an assessment of legitimacy includes more than the legitimacy of the project, and leads to assessing the appropriateness and desirability of the support to be rendered.

6.2.3 Shifting the object of the legitimacy assessment to the support that might be rendered

Once the project is seen as desirable, appropriate, by the potential supporter, and they are excited about supporting, they must consider the terms of for their interaction. Is their *support* legitimate? By rendering support, the supporter has the opportunity cost of being involved with *this particular* project, as opposed to some other project. Bitektine and Haack (2015) alert that, by engaging, the supporter might place themselves in the midst of conflicting institutional logics that are enacted in the entrepreneur's project. This is particularly evident when faced with a highly innovative project, one that stands out more than fits in. However, as we now see, this can actually be desirable for the supporter, given their own position against the conflicting logics as interaction in a joint effort (Rouse, 2020). Endorsement of the mechanisms that make the project stand out can be a way to resolve this tension, rather than become overtaken by it or by missing out on the opportunity to gain status through support with a competing, but winning, new logic.

Relational legitimacy comes full circle now, as the potential supporter responds to what the entrepreneur has brought to them, finding the type and amount of interaction that is appropriate for energetically supporting the entrepreneur's project, "rushing in" (Oreg et al., 2018). They find in the entrepreneur's project the chance to navigate what was a confusing environment, also becoming skillful cultural operators themselves (Toubiana et al., 2017; Voronov & Weber, 2016), learning with the entrepreneur how to bring this new, distinct, solution that fits in with their own relational challenges (Daudigeos, 2013; Fisher et al., 2017). Through this new solution of contradictions, they can navigate their own sets of relationships in ways that enhance their own interests, expanding their sense of influence (Methot et al., 2018; Obstfeld, 2005; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003).

The experience of learning to navigate such institutional challenges, coupled with a rush of excitement, in relational literature has been formally called *thriving* (Porath et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2005). We hold that, ultimately, relational legitimacy hinges on the potential supporter's

expectation to experience a state of thriving when they support the entrepreneur's project. When the entrepreneur is in line with the potential supporter's expectations around learning and excitement, the potential supporter will be ready to willfully respond with support. We now review the construct of thriving to gain insight into the underlying motivations that sustain an assessment of the desirability and acceptability of supporting a given project. This will also pinpoint some challenges that supporters face which can impinge on these motivations and, consequently, hinder positive assessments of the project.

6.2.4 Return on support: the expectation to thrive

Once supporters see the potential to experience thriving by supporting, they feel less misgivings about the project (Flinchbaugh, Luth, & Li, 2015) and perceive more positive qualities, finally assessing the project as appropriate and desirable and, therefore, are willing and able to expose themselves to the social cost of engaging with the entrepreneur's project (Cullen et al., 2018). As soon as this is resolved, we suppose that a positive feedback loop is triggered, where support—in whatever form—is met with more energizing experiences, and thereby becoming a source for the expectation of more energizing experiences for the supporter as they build solutions to matters of legitimacy together with entrepreneurs (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Rouse, *in press*).

The experience of thriving is a temporary state, with two necessary components: a) that energy is available to the person who experiences it (vitality) and b) that she is acquiring applicable knowledge and skills (learning) (Spreitzer et al., 2005: 538). It is a "state of positive functioning at its fullest range—mentally, physically, and *socially*." (Su, Tay, & Diener, 2014: 256). As a state, it can be gained or lost, according to how a person engages with certain favorable contextual social conditions (Brown et al., 2017) because she is learning and applying knowledge and skills to particular situations, with energy that is available in interaction throughout these situations (Porath et al., 2012). Research into this experience explores what these social conditions are, as well as what skills and personal traits facilitate such an experience. This literature seeks to maintain an

agentic view towards this experience, that is, it inquires how people seek out and maintain this state. Therefore, it speaks directly to the core matter of supporters' self-interested motivation in providing support. Specifically, this literature follows a hedonic paradigm, meaning that the state of thriving is seen to be desirable, in and of itself, rather than a means to achieve some other goal (Brown et al., 2017). We suspect that such a state is rather the end goal of other, more instrumental, goals, such as obtaining a financial return on investment—that is, perhaps obtaining the financial return is one of many ways to experience the rush of thriving, rather than the other way around, no matter how dispassionate, rational, cognitive investors might feel that their legitimacy judgement is. In the words of one manager, which could easily be heard from any given entrepreneur's supporter, thriving is “feeling valued, that what you do is valued. [...] being open to challenges presented [...]” (Spreitzer et al., 2005: 538).

Thriving mediates the relationship between stressors and life satisfaction, in that it can shift the negative experience of dealing with stressful environments, such as navigating opposing logics and finding the meaningful mix of standing out and fitting in, and turn them into inspiring challenges to be skillfully resolved (Flinchbaugh et al., 2015), as they experience that they are getting better at what they do (Porath et al., 2012). The impact of unpleasant events that result from interaction with the environment are buffered by the state of thriving because the person has a sense that, regardless these events, they are generally on a path that secures their activity and growth within the given environment (Gerbası, Porath, Parker, Spreitzer, & Cross, 2015; see also Oreg et al., 2018). It has even been suggested that a necessary antecedent might be the experience of a de-energizing context, where thriving would be the experience of achieving relatively more vitality and learning more (Park, 1998; see also Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994).

While current studies on the state of thriving are most often developed within the context of organizations rather than entrepreneurial ecosystems, we hold that these findings are desirable and appropriate for the study of entrepreneurship. The choice to develop seminal research on thriving within the context of the work space was because these researchers sought to capture an experience

that comprises a large portion of life, and not because thriving doesn't happen in other forums (Brown et al., 2017; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Here, an entrepreneur or supporter's involvement with an entrepreneurial ecosystem still revolves around tensions that guide a productive system (see, for example, Welter et al., 2017), so the insights from this literature should quite easily apply to supporters' and entrepreneurs' experience in facing challenges, *mutatis mutandis*.

Because supporters interact with different people throughout the ecosystem, be it to support entrepreneurs' projects or to simply maintain conversations with other actors, we suspect that they occupy particularly central positions, or tend to gain such central positions through their interactions (Podolny, 2001; Podolny & Baron, 1997). This can impinge on their state of vitality: Cullen et al. (2018) demonstrate that centrality in a network is positively related to task overload and role ambiguity, leaving these central people with diminished energy and confusing expectations on how they interact throughout the ecosystem. However, some central actors are able to maintain their experience of thriving by taking control of their interactions. Skillful actors do this through understanding their context and matching the right information to the right context. This skill moderates the relation between role ambiguity and overload on diminishing thriving.

While the literature surveyed above regarding legitimacy seems to tend towards an enactment of isomorphic forces, where the supporter might go against their own understandings of what is desirable in order to uphold a stabilized reference for positively evaluating legitimacy, the experience of thriving which can tip a potential supporter's assessment of legitimacy as rooted in relational practices can promote enthusiastic deviations from a dominant framework. The experience of thriving comes from a person's sense of their own decision-making discretion, from broad information sharing among colleagues, from cultivating a climate of trust and respect, as well as from gaining access to knowledge, and positive affective resources (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Similar to the agentic focus of the support literature, where supporters "willingly" support (Hanlon & Saunders, 2007: 607), people who thrive "heedfully relate" to "look out for one another by subordinating their idiosyncratic intentions to the effective functioning of the system" (Spreitzer et

al., 2005: 540) because it builds an overall climate of trust and respect. Thriving leads to greater creativity and novelty, by way of relationship development that is founded on openness to new ideas and influences throughout the organization, building a sense of progress and momentum (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2011). While Bitektine and Haack (2015) and Rao, Morrill, and Zald (2000) show that support to a given project is disruptive because it provides endorsement of a given logic which might engender social retaliation, the thriving literature gives space for a creative process that is established throughout relationship building efforts that strengthen (potentially subversive) projects. Here, supporters' and entrepreneurs' interaction with each other enhances their own personal experience, as well as their own environment's potential for providing more conditions for thriving (Bundick, Yeager, King, & Damon, 2010). In this sense, similar to entrepreneurs, supporters are cultural operators, learning how to navigate these conflicting logics by engaging with the entrepreneurs (Überbacher et al., 2015).

Transposing this to what we have seen so far about supporters, this would mean that providing support to a given project would be a way to look towards entrepreneurs to solve the ambiguous, de-energizing, position that supporters occupy within the ecosystem. Entrepreneurs build legitimacy through their relationships with potential supporters, enhancing relational legitimacy, and facilitating resolution of the ambiguities of these potential supporters' positions (Paterson et al., 2014). Potential supporters recognize the opportunity to resolve their ambiguities by finding the legitimate form of support they can render, and respond relationally to the entrepreneurs' projects by supporting, drawing from the relational legitimacy of the project. After all, thriving is sustained by involvement in quotidian activities, such as engaging with other actors through support (Mahoney, Ntoumanis, Mallett, & Gucciardi, 2014). If support to the entrepreneur's project is to offset the tensions between opposing logics and navigate the social costs of supporting more subversive projects, it should "pay off" with the experience of thriving within the given social setting (Amabile et al., 1994). We hold that support to the entrepreneur

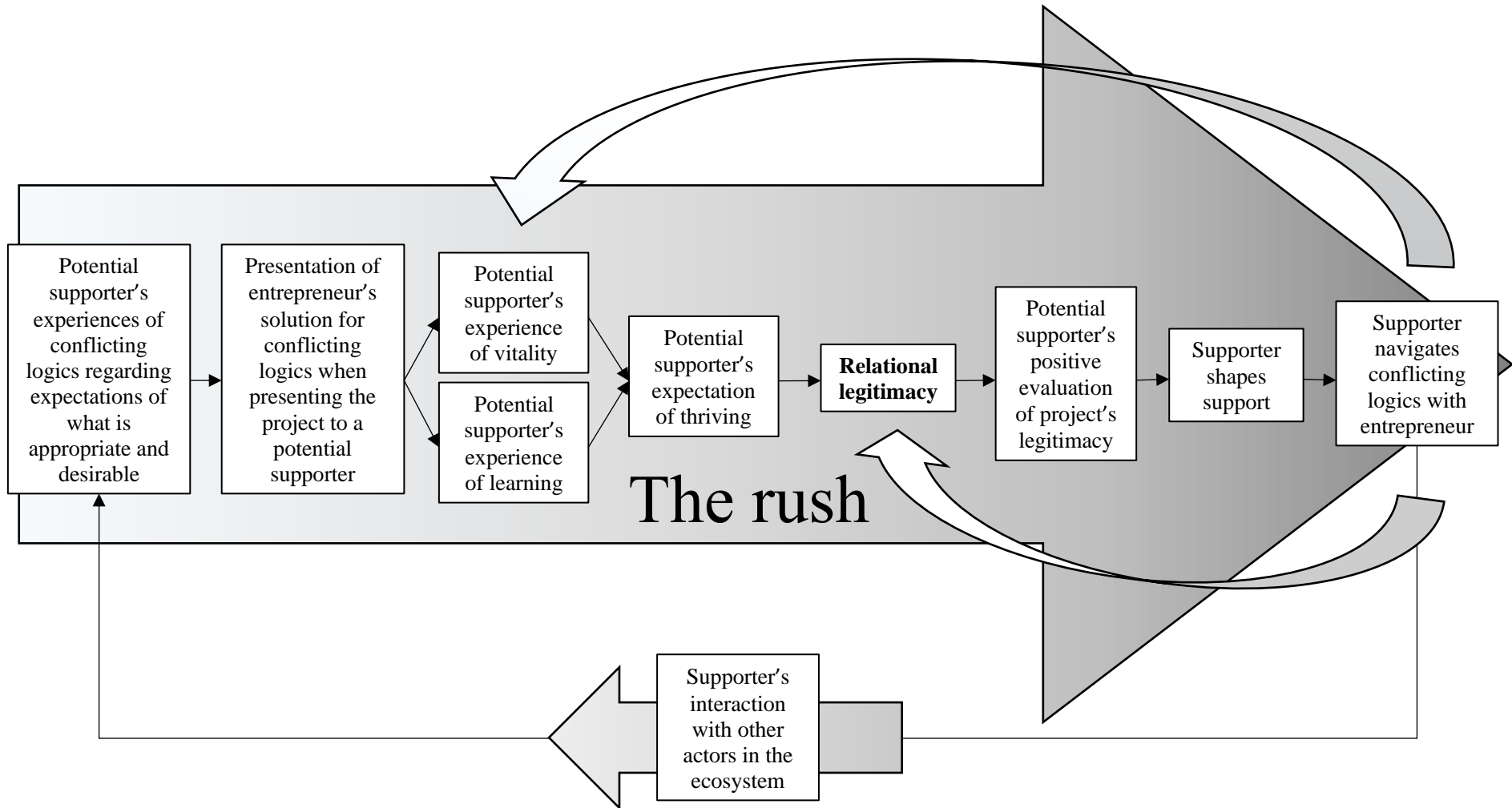
should contribute to an experience of thriving, in the sense that it enhances the supporter's experience of learning and vitality.

6.3 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Extant literature on the evaluative process around legitimacy mainly focusses on the cognitive frameworks. While acknowledging that there is an experiential component, it has refrained from discussing supporters' experience of supporting entrepreneurs, although institutional theory has begun to advocate for studies that take perspectives that are agentic (Hwang & Colyvas, *in press*; Lok & Willmott, 2019; Lounsbury, 2008) and emotional (Haack et al., 2014; Lok et al., 2017; Tost, 2011; Voronov & Weber, 2016). By looking at the expectation of thriving, we highlight the experiential nature that underlies these legitimacy assessments. Simply put, expectations of thriving should be associated with more positive assessments. The potential supporter sees that the entrepreneur and their project is in line with their own assessments of the thriving opportunities of the social context—not simply the assessment of what is appropriate, but what can be done within the tensions around what is appropriate—and that the expectations of de-energizing experiences in interactions is associated with distance from the potential supporter's assessment of the thriving opportunities in the social context (Tost, 2011).

Although recognition has been made that supporters are not a homogeneous audience (Tost, 2011; Überbacher, 2014; Überbacher et al., 2015), the mechanisms that underlie these heterogeneity in excitement and interaction are still unexplored. To understand why supporters support, we must understand why *this* particular supporter responds to *these* signals with *this* support, even though this would come at the cost of less generalizable theory (Hwang & Colyvas, *in press*). We propose that the answer to this lies in “energetic” qualities of the interaction, that is, that the supporter sees the possibility to *thrive* through engaging with the entrepreneur's project, thereby moving on a vague sense of acceptability, or even desirability (Oreg et al., 2018; Quinn & Dutton, 2005; Rouse, *in press*). This process is described in Figure 1.

Figure 6.1 – The affective underpinnings of legitimizing an entrepreneur's project



Our proposition is:

Proposition: support is associated with supporters' expectation of thriving (that is, learning and expanded vitality), which is established when supporters' de-energizing conflicting heuristics regarding the entrepreneur's project's acceptability and desirability are resolved through relational legitimacy.

A potential supporters' energy is "depleted" when they are faced with contradictions among the logics which they articulate in their relationships, as they feel they have limited access to fulfill their own interests. When the entrepreneur offers a solution to these contradictions by presenting the project they are developing, this becomes a matter of legitimacy, as opposed to other interpersonal experiences of energizing ties, such as pleasantness or power (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). When the potential supporter sees these solutions, the reasons for energy depletion are lifted, and the potential supporter feels relatively more energized. At the same time, they have an experience of learning new ways to recombine the logics that are conflicting. Of course, frustrations of expectations at this stage would emphasize the de-energizing positions, and erode the experience of a rush. The enhanced sense of vitality and learning, when achieved at this moment, renders ground for the expectation of thriving by engaging in this relationship with the entrepreneur and their project, thereby building relational legitimacy.

This is the moment where attention shifts from whether the project is legitimate, to what shape of support to the project would be legitimate. Therefore, relational legitimacy is the hinge upon which an assessment of legitimacy turns into an endorsing action by the supporter as a response to the entrepreneur's signaling practices. While the supporter shapes the support they will render and provides this support, they see greater relational legitimacy of the project and simultaneously experience enhanced vitality and learning. In other words, the relational legitimacy of the entrepreneur's project showcases the opportunities for the potential supporter to thrive by engaging with the project, giving the potential supporter a "rush". Friction comes from the supporter's interaction with other actors in the ecosystem, which can enhance the contradictions

already experienced or introduce new contradictions, as new solutions to these contradictions are created in different forums where the supporter participates.

Our discussion contributes to the call to understand how legitimacy is built, more specifically addressing Überbacher's (2014) challenge for future research to explore how evaluating audiences differ amongst themselves. We draw from the new perspective that institutional logics are in some manner conflictive, and that agency and emotions play an important role in how social processes play out (Lok et al., 2017; Suddaby, 2010; Voronov & Weber, 2016). Our contribution is that audiences differ in support inasmuch as certain relationships can explore syntheses of logics and facilitate the rendering of resources due to their own particular ways of functioning, and therefore suggest more or less legitimate terms of support to the entrepreneur's project. By attempting to realistically bring in a perspective of agency and affect around supporters who are tasked with assessing the legitimacy of entrepreneurs' projects (Ployhart & Bartunek, 2019; Tost, 2011), we hope to have shed light on these actors' own space, drawing a picture that breaks the view that supporters will inevitably, or even begrudgingly, support, through conformity and social pressure (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Cardinale, 2018). Potential supporters can become enthusiastic, energized, by getting to know the project as it solves conflicts between different social expectations, thereby facilitating supporters' positions in the ecosystem as social actors who articulate these expectations.

Adding to the above insight, we now we see that the supporter is seeking out the experience of thriving within their own social setting, which is the affective basis for the assessment of a project's legitimacy. They have a particular *modus operandi* as supporters to entrepreneurs, which stems from their position among different, possibly contradicting, logics and relationships of their own. As such, they can enhance, and even change, this de-energizing position by associating with entrepreneurs and providing them with support. By making the assessment of the appropriateness of the entrepreneur's project, the supporter assesses the terms upon which a greater experience of thriving can be achieved. Conversely, an entrepreneur's signal of the possibility to enhance the

experience of thriving can also (often correctly) entice the supporter to assess a given project as legitimate for their support. Either way, the expectation of thriving and the legitimacy assessment go hand in hand.

6.4 EPILOGUE

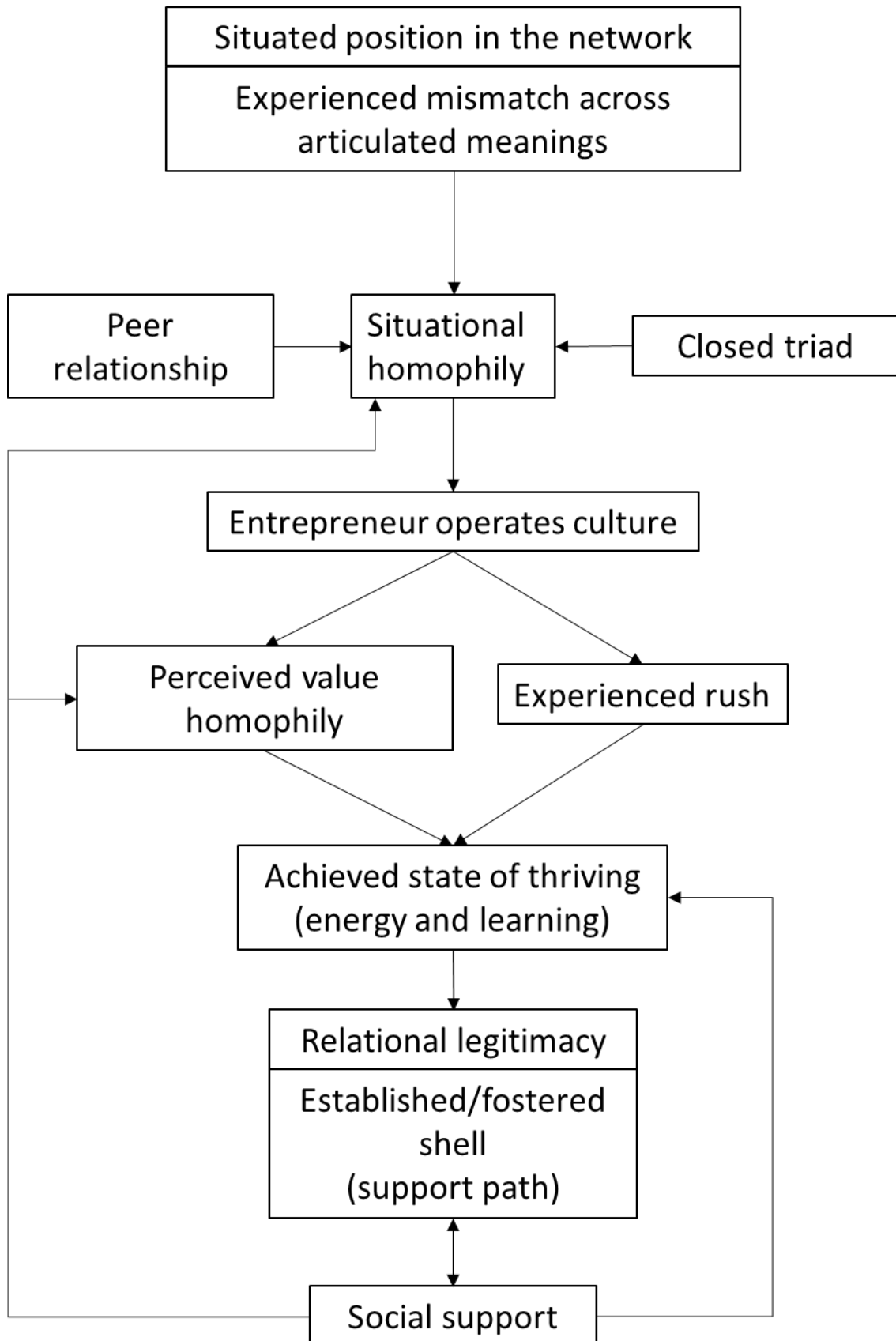
6.4.1 Bringing it together: The consolidated conceptual model

The present thesis has asked the question, “why do supporters willingly support entrepreneurs and their projects?” Starting from the intuition in extant literature that this stems from both structural and cultural (legitimacy-building) mechanisms, my co-authors and I have explored relational mechanisms that enable and shape the support that is rendered. The thesis was organized along a shifting of balance between the structural and cultural mechanisms, finally stumbling upon indications of psychological phenomena at play. I here present a model that integrates the insights from the previous chapters. See figure 6.2 for a summary of the model.

We saw that supporters are participants in several circles throughout the network at hand. By participating in these different circles in a community, mismatches emerge among the meanings that actors articulate. This presents a challenge, as these difficult situations disrupt and question established expectations, roles, heuristics, and so on. Entrepreneurs are in a position to untangle these situations in their relationships by delving into these situations. Entrepreneurs and their supporters can experience that they are in similar situations where relevant support can be rendered, either by being in peer relationships (similar status), or by participating in closed support triads (entrepreneur, support, and third parties support each other). Once situational homophily is established, the entrepreneur can demonstrate that they are able to disentangle the challenging situations by operating culture.

In this concluding chapter, we have demonstrated that successfully operating culture means

Figure 6.2 – Supporters’ perspectives of relational mechanisms that enable support to entrepreneurs



that the situation is disentangled in what is felt to be an appropriate, desirable manner. Supporters and entrepreneurs experience that they share similar values. This means that the entrepreneur is willing to accept supporters' support, and that supporters are willing to support the entrepreneur and their project. This willingness follows a feeling of relief from the challenging situation, a change in affective disposition we refer to as a "rush". Learning to navigate these challenging situations, alongside the experience of expanded energy, is a state referred to as "thriving". From this state, the project, the entrepreneur, and the potential support are evaluated as legitimate, inasmuch as it echoes and resolves challenging situations. Relational legitimacy is established, based on a sense that actors experience similar situations and share similar values. This solidifies the support path in what is experienced as a homophilous, supportive, shell, that stands to protect the supporter, the entrepreneur, and other people connected to the supporter against conflicting situations, or enhance their chances at building greater involvement with the surrounding network. Therefore, specific relational practices emerge between the actors that uphold this relational shell.

Support, in turn, is a reinforcer of this very process. First of all, support enhances the relational shell around the actors in question because it is an agentic, participative response to what the shell is about. By supporting, the supporter assumes their position within the shell, enhancing the practices and culture within that shell. I postulate that supporting, when within a functioning shell, is energizing because it enhances the means for the supporter to learn and participate in productive action that solves challenging situations. On the other hand, when this process comes up against new challenges, the basis for the support is shaken and mismatch arises. Support can also enhance the sense between the supporter and the entrepreneur and other actors that they share similar values, simply because it comes as a response to the signals sent out by the entrepreneur when operating culture. Essentially, support communicates to the entrepreneur that their project is, in fact, legitimate, given the common understanding of what is desirable and appropriate. Furthermore, support enhances situational homophily, not just because it shows that the supporter has relevant experience that inspires their relevant support, but also because the support engages

the supporter in the entrepreneur's situation. Their shared situation is the entrepreneur's situation, which is relevant because it speaks to the challenging situations the supporter experiences.

6.4.2 Recommendations for future directions

We have chosen to rely on interviews, forming cases that can be insightful for capturing the nuances in actors' experiences. Interviews explore the associations made to sustain informants' narratives of their experience, and therefore are limited to the way the informants portrays themselves (Richman, Kiesler, Weisband, & Drasgow, 1999; ten Have, 2007). To advance the findings in this thesis, other ways to collect, generate and analyze data are encouraged.

6.4.2.1 Inductive grounded theory (Gioia method)

As can be seen in the introduction section, social support discussions have delved into the matter of reciprocity, explicitly questioning the notion that actors rely solely on deliberation (Small & Sukhu, 2016) and showing that other schemes of reciprocity can be at hand other than restricted ledgers holding accounts of support efforts (Uehara, 1990). Rather, the effort placed into deliberating about who did what, when, and where is relativized. This discussion on the nuances of reciprocity has yet to be brought to discussions of support to entrepreneurs. Such a discussion will provide grounding to further explore ties as stories, which toggle a "grammar" of support that delineates a support network (White, 2008), both from the position of receiving, as well as giving, support. From these interviews, we can capture the stories that provide grounds for actors' characterization of the tie as a "type of tie", and thereby connecting role expectations with actors' governance of reciprocity through their mutual support efforts rendered to each other. Here, we can also capture an overarching narrative that characterizes the meaning of "support" as bound in entrepreneurs' challenging situations, both as experienced by entrepreneurs and as viewed by supporters. This describes the grounds, or "grammar", through which entrepreneurs network of

support elicits their given “support network” which, although comprised of different types of ties, is a set that the interviewee considers to satisfactorily exhaust the “support” that is available.

6.4.2.2 Longitudinal data collection through interviews

Further inquiry can be made when using these interviews into the mechanisms that underlie support relationships. While the findings here discussed have emphasized the similarities among actors, we have not yet scrutinized the moments in entrepreneurs’ and supporters’ accounts where there is disagreement. By having both accounts, such a comparison is possible. stresses the importance of disjoint, mismatch, and ambiguity for the emergence of meanings within ties. In fact, dynamism in a relationship is predicated upon the way actors reconcile their divergences, and meanings emerge as they navigate these situations together. When people stumble upon such a mismatch in their relationship, they struggle for control over the rising ambiguity, and the meaning of the encounter emerges for the dyad. Stories, in this perspective, are the ties’ struggle to control the changes by putting it into “accounts with a beginning, a middle, and an end” (White, 2008: 20) to try to “grasp” the ongoing, though disjointed, relationship. If there is an relationship that is co-created by supporters and that shapes the support efforts, it must be fluid enough through different contexts to fully embody each different context (Padgett & Ansell, 1993). This means that throughout the entrepreneur’s network, shifts in the codes and routines are obliged to occur as relationships are added and new situations arise (Mische & White, 1998). To fully grasp these dynamic, within eighteen months I gathered follow-up interviews with several of the pairs of supporters and entrepreneurs, as well as interviewed new supporters as entrepreneurs chose to describe these relationships in their new narratives. Through this, competing narratives in the original set of interviews can be uncovered when comparing entrepreneurs’ and supporters’ accounts, and then the outcome in the relationships can be found in the second set of interviews.

6.4.2.3 Recorded conversations

The data used in the present study is not without limitations. Firstly, while interviews are helpful to portray experiences as they are described by actors', they do not reveal the behavior that occurs in support efforts (van den Berg, 2008). How does an actor's reflection about a network relate to actions taken to provoke change in a network? This builds from the assumption that conversations have the dual function of enacting cognition regarding a network structure (Quinn & Dutton, 2005), while also establishing actors' position within a network structure that can be conceptualized and navigated (Tilly, 2005). This discussion distinguishes between two types of conversation, according to the level of involvement of the researcher: investigation, with high involvement (such as an interview) and a recorded dialogue, with no involvement from the researcher (such as day-to-day conversation). Essentially, the objective is to seek a way to both pinpoint meanings in actors' life-world while, simultaneously, following how these meanings are articulated in conversation. In this project, the method is illustrated through analysis of interviews and dialogues held between a mentor and a mentee. This is an ideal setting because, in this pair, the roles are clearly set, as the mentor uses conversations strategies to provoke changes in the mentee's mental framework that will enhance their access to resources that are vital to navigating a specific domain, that is, their professional development.

6.4.2.4 Diaries

Diary and other constant forms of story collection more fine-grained views of the experience as it unfolds (Bearman & Stovel, 2000; Hyers, 2018; Vogel, 2017; Yen, Fu, & Hwang, 2016). Here, studies would be able to follow narratives that cover shorter periods of time, around more specific situations, with multiple support paths. Diaries are quite useful in learning and mentoring initiatives within entrepreneurship and generally (Kaandorp, van Burg, & Karlsson, 2020; Linehan & O'Brien, 2017; Schmitz & Wiese, 2006; Shek, Sun, Ching, Lung, & Sui, 2008). They should be readily available for analysis in accelerators and other entrepreneurship training programs. To fully

explore support paths, such diaries should also be kept by the assigned mentors. References to fellow entrepreneurs who participate in such programs should also be tracked, following a network of accounts of peer relationships.

6.4.2.5 Experiments

Experiments have a long tradition in social exchange theory (Neuhofner, Reindl, & Kittel, 2016). Specifically, they have been quite informative in observing reciprocity (Molm, Collett, & Schaefer, 2007) and in tracking the role and intensity of affect in certain types of exchange networks (Lawler et al., 2008). Similar experiments can be designed to test the effects of support paths on support efforts, affect, and legitimacy judgements. These experiments can create situations as experimental conditions, following the definition above in chapter V, following the affective experiences that follow. Once that relationship is established, further experiments can explore how the emerging situated positions of actors are judged for legitimacy, with affect as a moderator. Finally, an experiment can be run to explore what support is rendered and with what intensity according to resolved situations.

6.4.2.6 Simulations

Simulations through Agent-Based Modeling can transfer our propositions to the ecosystem level (Edmonds et al., 2019; Flache et al., 2017). Ozdemir, Moran, Zhong, and Bliemel (2016), for example, used simulations to test and demonstrate how their refined definitions of brokerage would impact entrepreneurial ecosystems, and then used these to reinterpret findings in extant literature. The present thesis was designed around triads because of their importance to grasping relational complexity in networks. The view obtained around support paths required more in-depth contact with informants than questionnaires would allow, and so obtaining a view of full ecosystems would require a great deal of resources (see Uehara, 1990; Wellman et al., 2006; and Wellman & Wortley, 1990 for such wide-scale, in-depth investigations of social support in communities). Simulations

can, at least, provide a view of boundary conditions around support to entrepreneurs, based on our propositions.

To this end, first the simulation should describe random associations among actors according to stocks and combinations of knowledge, where the rule should privilege association due to similar stocks of knowledge and similar associations within that knowledge. Agents should be enabled to “learn” by adding to their stock of knowledge and/or re-associating the knowledge they hold. Complexity can be introduced by adding actors in cohorts that have new stocks of knowledge and allowing actors to obtain knowledge across cohorts. Based on this simulation, needs can be introduced, where actors require certain combinations of knowledge to resolve a problem. Adding to this, rules can be generated where the problems emerge by imposing interaction among actors that have different stocks of knowledge or associations among the knowledge they hold, thereby requiring certain combinations of certain knowledge that would be obtained by interacting and “learning” with other agents. Throughout these simulations, I expect to see agents clustering according to specific knowledge structures, but I also expect to see the emergence of particularly distinct agents that would act as supporters, holding the ecosystem together.

6.4.3 Contributions

The studies presented in this thesis have sought to delve into the experience of support, drawing attention to supporters’ experience of their position between an entrepreneur and a third party. Firstly, we surveyed the literature on social support to find how wellness and stress are managed through relationships and comparing this to what has been achieved so far in extant studies of support to entrepreneurs. We found that there is need for more studies that reach beyond entrepreneurs and inquire about the conditions around supporters. We also found that, just as rich descriptions of the experience of support have been obtained through interpretivist phenomenology in social studies, there is space for such studies in discussing support to entrepreneurs, specifically. In chapter III, we compared combinations of direct and indirect relationships that compose

developmental support paths, finding that advice emerges in developmental support paths where the third party is a peer to the supporter, and that, while the supporter can be both a mentor or a peer, the mentors in such combinations would provide advice when they addressed uncomfortable situations in their relationships with the entrepreneur. In chapter IV, we looked deeper into the experience of being set in support paths, finding that the support efforts rendered to entrepreneurs are part of efforts to cultivate similarities amongst the actors involved against the backdrop of their experience of the wider network. In this way, supporters enhance their own position in their own networks. Finally, in discussing the legitimacy judgements made by supporters who are faced with the choice to make support efforts to entrepreneurs, we suggest that, when supporters experience these similarities, they sense the possibility that supporting an entrepreneur will provide the means to achieve a state of thriving.

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Appendix A – On tenacious relationships in support paths (Supplementary material for Chapter III)

Guided by the code regarding de-energizing affective experience, we scanned the content of the cases that had direct mentor relationships. We found that these mentors made a point of describing how persisting through frustrating conversations can lead them to deepen their relationship with the entrepreneur, enhancing their mutual understanding (Hmieleski et al., 2015; Ozdemir et al., 2016; Ozgen & Baron, 2007).

This fits with the nature of developmental support relationships, since they have a component of emotional support (Cotton et al., 2011; Dobrow et al., 2012; St-Jean & Audet, 2009, 2012). As an interpersonal experience, they imply a tension from the challenges to one's own worldview (Parker et al., 2008; see also Carlile, 2004). Entrepreneurship is definitely not without its emotional difficulties, and coping with such difficult situations by learning to persist through unpleasantness is an important component to the entrepreneurial process (Baron, 2008; Cope, 2011). Janssen, van Vuuren, and de Jong (2015) found that the entrepreneurs' persistence through such difficult experiences is a key element in harnessing the positive effects of nourishing relationships with supporters. Mentor relationships have been found to be a source of great support exactly *because* they tend to be considerably more accepting towards uncomfortable, negative experiences—as long as they skillfully embrace the difficulty until the frustrating situation is untangled (Higgins & Kram, 2001; St-Jean & Audet, 2009; St-Jean & Mathieu, 2015). However, Goswami et al. (2018) note that the value of mentor relationships has been overstated, demonstrating that some mentors were not necessarily those supporters who were readily available or motivated to persist in the supporting relationship. Conversely, relationships with peer supporters, especially those which are more difficult to sever, can be overburden the supporter, due to the high expectation of reciprocity, hindering productive interaction (Ruef et al., 2003). In any case, positive affective experiences with third parties have been shown to boost the affective experience between supporters and entrepreneurs (Nielsen, 2019).

Tenacious relationships are those where entrepreneurs and supporters embrace uncomfortable affective experiences due to challenging situations. The coding scheme used for tenacious relationships is reported in Table A.1, below.

Table A.1 – Fuzzy-set coding for membership in the tenacity condition

Tenacity	
Describes actively handling negative emotions ²⁴ that arise in the relationship	1,0
Cognition of and engagement with problems in their relationship without acknowledging emotions	0,6
Describes negative emotions that they dismiss in interaction	0,4
No account of negative affect	0,0

Eight of the cases had tenacious relationships in the direct tie. Clearly, tenacity is a common feature in advising relationships. In the truth table, one line was without cases: tenacious indirect mentor relationship paired with a tenacious direct mentor relationship. For this reason, the parsimonious solution is appropriate, using the theoretically-driven assumption that tenacious relationships will contribute to advising (Duşa, 2019).²⁵ Table A.2 reports this analysis.

The importance of tenacious relationships is fully portrayed in the Supported Tenacious Mentor Relationship solution, described in the column on the right. This solution was not described in the intermediary solution. It does not draw attention to the mentor/peer condition in the indirect relationship, but rather supports the theory at the dyadic level, that tenacious relationships contribute to the flow of usable knowledge through mentoring relationships.

The column on the left is a peer-peer support path, the same as revealed in the previous analysis. This shows that, even considering tenacious relationships, simply being a peer-peer support path is

²⁴ Positive affective experience was reported in all accounts of support explored deeply in the interviews. We can understand from this that all the cases refer to generally positive ties, without variation, where only some also experienced negative affect. What is less clear in the accounts is how much the description of positive affect is the result of a social desirability response (Richman et al., 1999). For these two reasons, accounts of positive affect were not included in the analysis.

²⁵ To explore an alternative approach to the case comparison, we added the tenacious direct supporter relationship condition to the analysis reported in table 3.6 regarding closure and third party tenure/experience. This showed, simply, that a tenacious direct relationship was a sufficient condition for supporters to advise (raw coverage: 0,68, consistency: 0,87). As a sufficient relational condition, tenacity in the direct support relationship is an overarching superset for understanding supporters' advising efforts. Remember, though, that lack of tenacity in direct peer relationships is equifinal in obtaining advice, when in the relational conditions described above.

Table A.2 – Parsimonious solution for supporter and third party tenacity and experience/tenure

	Peer-peer	Tenacious Supporter-peer	Tenacious Mentor
Entrepreneur ← Supporter	⊗	●	●
Mentor Tenacity			●
Supporter ← Third party	⊗	⊗	●
Mentor Tenacity			●
Raw coverage	0,63	0,59	0,26
Solution coverage	0,86		
Solution consistency	0,91		
Solid circles (●) indicate the presence of the condition and crossed circles (⊗) indicate its negation. Lack of a circle indicates equifinality, that is both presence and absence are sufficient to obtain the outcome. Tenacity is assumed to contribute to advising for this solution (Fiss, 2011).			

a sufficient condition for advising to happen. In this solution, the relationship between the supporter and the entrepreneur might even benefit from lack of tenacity, avoiding overburdening the peer supporter or peer third party with requests for support, although tenacity is also allowed. That is, both the presence and the negation of tenacious relationships are equifinal in facilitating advice.

The middle column is the tenacious supporter-peer support path, where the relationship between the entrepreneur and the supporter clearly thrives on such a tenacious experience, as expected. Here, the supporter can be either a peer or a mentor, capturing our intuition about the cases. In other words, for the mentor to be a part of the solution, tenacity in the direct relationship becomes a necessary component (St-Jean & Audet, 2009).

Finally, we did an fsQCA on the negation of the advising outcome using direct and indirect tenure/life experience and tenacity. As expected, the opposite solution was obtained: non-tenacious mentor-mentor support paths (raw coverage: 0,28, consistency 1,0; for minimum value third parties, raw coverage 0,42, consistency: 1,0). Perhaps there is something constraining in these mentor relationships that discourages embracing controversial, or difficult conversations, which would account for the difficulty in finding cases that represent support paths with both tenacious direct and indirect mentor relationships.

We subsequently turned to within-case analyses to understand the role of relationships to third parties in tenacious mentor support paths. While peer-peer support paths seem not to require frustrating, difficult, conversations, mentor relationships seem to do best when cultivating tenacity (Cope, 2011; St-Jean & Audet, 2009). In Five, the mentor's values are expressed first and foremost in her tenacity. The entrepreneur says regarding the support from her mentor supporter (and mother),

“Lately, she has chewed me out. [Bursts out laughing and imitating shouting] ‘You need to have focus! You have to make it happen! You’ve been at this business for a year already! Get on it!’ ”

Five, entrepreneur

Then, in a calm voice, she listed a series of the mentor supporter's supportive actions. When asked how it feels to be ‘chewed out’ like that, the entrepreneur said,

“It feels good. Someone at least cares if it’s happening or not. [...] I feel frustration, too. I feel frustrated from not making it happen, of still having to be chewed out because it’s not ready yet.”

Five, entrepreneur

But the entrepreneurs' understanding of the support only scratches the surface of what is at play in the advice she receives because she is unaware of what happens in the indirect relationship with the third party. Although the emphasis is on the forceful, uncomfortable, tenacious experience, for the mentor the crux of the matter is sticking together to “make it happen”. The mentor emphasized how she and her own third party worked out disagreements between themselves regarding their own freelance projects, stating that it is important to get operations correctly organized and executed because a failure to deliver results in destroying the business, since they are in a risky, unsettling world. The main solution here is their open channel of communication, which makes it possible for them to align understanding about the “right” organization and execution of actions (Ozgen & Baron, 2007; Spigel, 2017). The mentor said of her peer third party, “This access to her is very important, because I know I can call, say, ‘hey, let’s talk about this?’ and she says,

‘yes, let’s!’ ” She contrasted this with unsupportive partners, with whom she felt, “thrown to the dogs, like you’re worthless” (St-Jean & Audet, 2009). On the contrary, with her third party,

“I feel taken in, it’s a feeling of partnership. Like, the two of us, we know that things work this way. The economic crisis is very strong. If we don’t stick together, nothing will come about. So we know that all professionals have to get together to get out of this economic crisis and not go around acting on their own, you know. That won’t get anyone anywhere.”

Five, supporter

In Hour, a case where advising occurred, the entrepreneur was quite descriptive of the tenacious attitude of the mentor, which he reenacted in the following quote. Here, there was tension between them as the mentor insisted that nothing is settled until people “sign their names on the dotted line”, while the entrepreneur felt that the mentor took things too seriously, responding that when relationships are built, deals close naturally.

*“ ‘Man, did you close the deal?’ ‘No, the deal wasn’t closed.’ ‘F***, why didn’t you close it?’ It’s a question, like, ‘dude?!’ ‘Erm, because of this, this, this.’ He says, ‘man, what the f***! F***, we’ve talked about this!’ It’s a demanding relationship that pushes you forward. [...] I think that entrepreneurs by nature have to be resilient. So I think this is natural.”*

Hour, entrepreneur

This is echoed in the conversations the mentor supporter continually has with his third party, who is his wife. They have opened and sold several businesses together and have learned from these experience to handle challenges. While he stressed his own maturity as an entrepreneur, he sees that recognizing one’s own constant “immaturity” is inherent to being an entrepreneur in an unclear, unsettling situation, which he overcomes together with his longstanding relationship with his wife.

“Opening a new company, I guess, is like going back to High School days. It’s like changing schools, there’s all the period of adapting, the challenges, it is very harmful to a marriage to go through these initial stages. [...] There is a lot of learning from things of the past and... from the challenges faced before and how they were overcome, and I think that when we face the challenge once again, ‘ah, this here I’ve seen before, go, go, go, go! Once it falls into place, I’ll get that thing there’, and then it’s overcome. We know that it’s all about perseverance, perseverance.”

Hour, supporter

He then compared this with the manner in which new entrepreneurs face the challenges of opening a new venture, “I think that first time entrepreneurs, they don’t know what they will be up against.”

Reading this “downstream”, from the third party to the entrepreneur, we see that the mentor supporter has learned from shared experience about perseverance and follow-through as signs of maturity. When faced with inexperienced entrepreneurs, the terms of inexperience are already set—he knows what to look for if he is going to help develop the inexperienced entrepreneur. The mentor supporter repeatedly communicates these terms by explicitly engaging with frustration with the entrepreneur’s shows of inexperience, which for the entrepreneur are translated in an experience of being cared for through forceful advice. It brings the frustrations inherent to the entrepreneurial process to the foreground within a supportive environment, thereby modeling the role of the entrepreneur according to the mentor supporter’s understanding, as developed in shared experiences with the peer third party (Eesley & Wang, 2017; Mathias et al., 2015; Uy, Sun, & Foo, 2017).

The mentor supporter’s tenacity with the entrepreneur brings the entrepreneur closer to the real challenges of a dire business environment as she has experienced it together with her third party, preparing the entrepreneur for greater involvement with her own cohesive, supporting, network (Jack & Anderson, 2002; Thompson et al., 2018; Welter et al., 2018). Tenacious mentor-peer support paths operate on a very specific notion of how entrepreneurship should work well, which is developed and reinforced in the relationship between the supporter and the third party. Because this is relationally bound and shared with their wider network, these mentors are tenacious in their interaction with entrepreneurs so that the entrepreneur is molded into their framework (Ozgen & Baron, 2007; Thompson et al., 2018). In contrast to the peer-peer support paths, where similarities along the path made for simple translations of knowledge through analogies, mentors in tenacious mentor-peer support paths work hard to break through entrepreneurs’ existing mental structures and instill them with “deep” lessons they learned alongside their own peers (Ahsan et al., 2018). These are not simple notions of best practices they learned through a third party’s advice, but rather deep convictions derived from their shared experiences (Carlile, 2002, 2004).

Appendix B – Steps for the within-case analysis (Supplementary material for Chapter IV)

Table B.1 – QSA coding methodology

Informant	Steps	Example (from Echoes)
Entrepreneur	Scan interview with entrepreneur for themes, narratives, characterizations of interactions, etc. (includes matters of support)	Although the entrepreneur says the supporter, who is the manager of the co-working space, gives "999%" effort to her business, said that initially it was difficult to get included in the co-working space. <i>"And so we came to the co-working space, it was sort of tough to do, like, 'Jonas, for the love of God, nanananana, let me in, so on and so forth,' and then he said, 'ah, okay, alright Maga, come.' And then today, it's like, 'Má, it's so good that you insisted because it really worked and thank God it did.'"</i>
	Raise questions to clarify these themes, narratives, characterizations, etc.	What was the reason for the supporter's initial resistance? Why did that change to enthusiastic "999%" support?
	Find clarification of these questions in the interview with the entrepreneur	Before coming to the co-working space, the current endeavor was a project inside a freelance consulting effort. It was very rudimentary. <i>"We were in a limbo, working in the old company's office, trying to understand if we should fire employees, if we were really freelance consultants, we didn't have an office."</i> The support they asked for required putting effort into a nearly non-existent endeavor. <i>"He gave us a real big vote of faith. We put together a slide, it was just a ppt. We only really delivered and had to run around like crazy lunatics during our vacation, recruit people, recruit teachers, because Jonas said, 'okay, you can use a room for two months.' And we were all, 'dude, Jonas, what now? What are we going to do?'"</i> This support is analogous to "high risk" investment, where the supporter becomes a sponsor to the project. <i>"[Interviewer: What sort of relationship do you have with the supporter?] "So... I don't know what I'd call that relationship, but believing, betting on us, putting his neck out, because he has to show results, so, okay, he's not putting in money, but he is putting in, I mean, he could take in a startup that, I dunno, had proven itself more, that had been around more, I dunno. I think it is a sponsorship, he, he's a sponsor, uh... he's a sponsor, but not in money. He is a believer, he is a dreamer for us, I dunno, I dunno."</i>

Supporter	Find clarification of these questions in the interview with the supporter	Reason for enthusiasm hinges on Echoes' social impact objective AND Magali's track record: <i>"Regarding Echoes specifically, I can say that she asked to do Echoes at our co-working space, we liked it, we thought it was interesting, their objective is really cool, we really trust Magali's work, I really trust in Magali's work, and so we decided to give them our support."</i> [Interviewer: What do you like about the project?] <i>"It fills in a gap that is completely necessary here in Brazil. [Jonas goes to great length describing the need for learning programming at school.]"</i> Echoes has severe deficiencies which it might never overcome. [Interviewer: what are Echoes' needs?] <i>"Needs are to scale. Scale Echoes. Instead of training twenty, thirty students, to be able to train so many more than that. It is a project that relies too much on Magali and her partner, I don't know if, it's a doubt that I have at the moment, that at the moment that the project scales, if this same network will be available to handle the content that she is passing on."</i> <i>"She asked to do Echoes here, for example, and we liked the project and supported it. So much that now they are studying—they are using the co-working space's infrastructure a lot, the co-working space is supporting Echoes a lot, we don't charge them anything for the use of our space, it is an example."</i>
	Scan interview with supporter for themes, narratives, characterizations of interactions, etc.	Note that above, confidence is given to Magali's work, and not just Echoes' potential.
	Raise questions to clarify emerging themes, narratives regarding relationship with entrepreneur	What distinguishes Magali's work or track record?
	Find clarification of the questions about the relationship with the entrepreneur	The entrepreneur has a distinguished involvement in a leading forum that shapes the entrepreneurial ecosystem and has drawn attention to herself as a high potential leader. <i>"Magali is very young. There is a group of female CIOs, that is, female directors of technology that have been meeting for many years. At the end of last year, I invited Magali over so I could talk with them, because to my mind, Magali is the new generation of these female CIOs. So there is much interaction like that which we end up doing, organized organically. My initial idea, Magali is someone I have had my eye on for some time because of this issue of women empowerment, because of how she has stood out in the market. And when we were setting up the co-working space, I talked with her about being community manager, I wanted to hire Magali. And in our conversations she explained to me the work she was doing with her consulting initiative, what she intended to do, how she was working on educating young people, so I changed my conversation with her and said, 'gee, cool, so we need to stay close. Don't you want to come to our co-working space?'"</i> [Side note: he tells the story as if he had invited, and not as if Magali had begged to join.]

	<p>Raise questions to clarify emerging themes, narratives regarding relationship with third party (not necessarily contingent on the previous analysis)</p>	<p>What sort of impacts do the supporter and third party value? Is it about impact on society?</p>
	<p>Find clarification to the questions about the relationship with the third party</p>	<p>The supporter and third party are interested in keeping up with trends and finding opportunities in the challenges faced by society. It is unclear whether they are actually mission driven, or see these challenges as the opportunities for high growth endeavors (though it is worthy noting that the tension between profit and mission does not appear to be an issue for them). They have a preoccupation with execution. <i>"I met him at an event five or six years ago. Then we started building a relationship. Since I entered the job market in [year], myself, along with other people [lists names] we founded an event called [XXXX], the first of which was December of the same year. It was the first meetup of entrepreneurs in this, in Brazil, the first, the biggest, the most important, and is still one of the most important of its sort. And because of this event, I ended up meeting a lot of people, and I think Duarte I met because of this event."</i> <i>"We talk about the co-working space, the operation, the challenges, the companies that come through here, the people who come through here, and about the market, what's going on, economic crisis, will the crisis get in the way, will it not get in the way, about investments, about investors, what sort of novelty do we see, what new business models are emerging, so it's always a very wide discussion."</i> <i>"We share many ideas. We especially share ideas about Brazil's current state, that is a challenging moment, but where there is also opportunity. We really share the idea about how initiatives like this that we are managing can, uh, can make a huge impact on the ecosystem so, uh, yeah, many."</i></p>
<p>Both</p>	<p>Write up a summary of how the relationships around the supporter constrain and enable the support rendered to the entrepreneur.</p>	<p>Even prior to managing the co-working space, the supporter and the third party have jointly participated in efforts to begin trends that shape the municipal and national entrepreneurship ecosystem (incidentally, focusing on the same industry as the entrepreneur). This shared interest in such efforts that shape the industry is founded on an ever-constant effort to spot opportunities for industry growth in the midst of social crises—something the economic crisis was rife with (challenges and opportunities). The third party is on the board of the co-working space, and therefore enforces the need to host businesses that will have high growth and high returns rooted in opportunities formed against social challenges. The entrepreneur's business is quite well aligned with a clear social challenge, but was less mature than acceptable for the co-working space's standards, with very doubtful ground for scalability. Endorsing the entrepreneur's project placed the supporter in an awkward position, including in his personal relationship with the third party: it lacked high growth potential. However, the personal relationship with the entrepreneur indicated to the supporter that she was firmly aligned with their interest in setting trends against social challenges and that she was capable of turning her endeavor into one of high growth and high impact.</p>

Appendix C – Ethnographic Account (Supplementary material for Chapter V)

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C. ON THE RELEVANCE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD NOTES

Chapter V would be incomplete without including the field notes. In fact, this might be the most provocative section of the paper, serving as a deep view of the empirical situations that ground the paper’s theorization. It also provides insight throughout the linguistic cracks that fully situate the context where these actions come from. Unfortunately, the present form of academic literature has little physical space for such thick description. I adhere to more common form in the genre of academic writing by summarizing some key features in (somewhat misleading) tables in the body of the paper.

Presenting a reflection on field notes in literary style has been employed in ethnographic studies to remove the ethnographer from a (supposed) position of authority which the neutral style can seem to imply (Clifford, 1986) and immerse writer and reader within the social reality (Crapanzano, 1986). Although this breaks from traditional academic form, the account highlights my physical presence in the situations which were shared group experiences as foundation for posterior theorizing efforts (Fleckenstein, 1999; see also Germain & Laifi, 2018). In her provocative cyborg manifesto, Haraway (2016 [1985]) states that such ironic language is a rhetorical strategy that highlights irreconcilable contradictions. It is blasphemous inasmuch as it

erases boundaries while challenging readers to take responsibility for their (re)construction. She then proceeds to perform this ironic reflection in a difficult text that forces the reader to frustrate the understandings they had when they entered the reading.

A practical illustration of the power of humor to overcome boundaries: Daryl Davies, a musician (who happens to be “of color” in the United States), invited the Grand Dragon of the KKK (and his bodyguard) to a conversation in a hotel room. A snapping sound! And both the musician and the klansman were certain that they were under attack from the person sitting across from them. But it was the ice and the soft-drinks on the bar beside them that had melted and snapped. They had a laugh at their own tense prejudices and began bonding, in what turned out to be a long, fruitful, friendship²⁶.

Closer to home, in a similar blasphemous act, Gaddefors and Anderson (2017) introduce the term “entrepreneursheep” to question the locus of agency in the entrepreneurial process, thereby shaking the very definition of the core phenomenon of interest in our field. Dey and Steyaert (2010: 101) provocatively sidestep grammatical convention, simply concluding, “In short: social entrepreneurship, perhaps, etc.”. This odd sentence summarizes their full critique of the politics of narrating social entrepreneurship. In this vein, the literary style I employ in the description (and have also sprinkled into the text so far) allows for the entrance of affect in the reflection, particularly of humor, an important, though overlooked tool to provoke reflection in ethnographic accounts (Jackson Jr., 2010).

While this account is of one single case, it is described through specific episodes. These episodes describe instances of mismatch in encounters, allowing for a “cross-episode” comparison in the discussion. I rely on thick description to provide linguistic cues that can open language play that will entice the reader beyond the theoretical discussion of constructs, in the spirit of the story of the “Bazaar Economy” (Geertz, 1978) and “Deep play” cockfights (Geertz, 2005). As a *post hoc*

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORp3q1Oaezw>, retrieved on May 28, 2020.

“interpreter”, I process the situations observed and accounts informants gave me, placing emphasis on the details which seemed, to me, to be relevant as I sought to understand what was going on around me. I reflect upon the content of the field notes and recorded conversations through “ironic detachment”, to portray an ethnographic “comedy of manners” (Fine, 2003: 54).

The emphasis in this account is on the eccentricities that actors find themselves up against when interacting with other actors. Incidentally, the term “eccentric” refers, not only to the peculiarities of individuals or groups, but also to deviations from a “perfectly circular path” (Mirriam-Webster.com), especially in Middle English, where the term *eccentrik* indicates planetary orbits that do not have the Earth as the center (www.thefreedictionary.com). The eccentricities emerging within the social system in Combrayville suggest that more is at hand than what seems visible to the actors, who are taxed with inferring what governs the “eccentric” behavior of other actors in the system.²⁷

Following a phenomenological approach, I attempt to see the actors as morally neutral, while striving to preserve their voice in each episode in the hopes that the reader will catch the mismatches through comparison (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006). Each episode describes an encounter in a process of non-linear unfolding of ethnography (Duymedjian et al., 2019). Effort is placed on providing details that serve as clues to the eccentricities, here indicated with the term “special”, which anchor and lubricate the difficult issues of disjoint and mismatch permeating social space. As a literary exercise for theorization (Germain & Laifi, 2018), the description does not follow chronological order. Rather follows an alternative organization that enhances the phenomena of interest, since, in a phenomenological exercise, time is reflexive and experiential (Drakopoulou Dodd et al., 2013).

C.1. Final Moments—December 3rd

Several hundred meters off to my right: the echo of a hammer on wood, one more new inhabitant of Combrayville setting up a cabin with a view of the rolling, green mountains, where

²⁷ I thank Laurent Javaudin for this contribution.

the pounds echoed across town and into the woods already bare for the winter. Several hundred meters off to my left: something heavy pouring or sliding into something large. Ahead of me: a bird quipping, not unlike baseball cards on bike spokes, a nostalgia I had read about in old second-hand books. Two people were having a conversation, and they were distant.

Under my feet: melting snow, invisible but audible as it trickled through gravel, like the rustle of dust on a vinyl record.

Under the sky, blue as only a wintry day can be, lulled by the silence, I dozed on a bench in violation of the Capitalist/Protestant declaration that time is money which keeps me driven and against the better judgements of urban street smarts that have more often than not kept me from being a victim of urban crime. For my last hour in Combrayville, I was stranded. I had arrived promptly at 8:20, held an interview, hiked, and sat at the local café and the first bus out would leave at 13:24. An hour later, I was on the bus that took me down the mountain in twenty-six minutes, back to the city where people like me had things to do.

Just downhill from the church cemetery, La Salle de les Gamelans was being birthed by some of the locals. It was to be a fab lab, a civic center, a co-working space, a hub, a catalyst of sorts.

C.2. Setting

Combrayville is a special place. Walled off from all things urban by mountains, the community is organized around a city square, where one can find the grocery store, the school, the church, the town hall, the tourist information center, the café, and the shutdown and cobwebbed tobacco shop. Other than the cross and clock on the church and the Unilever logo on the plastic trash bin outside the café, everything is unique to the town. Today, when stepping off the bus, one is greeted by several signs organized vertically between two wooden posts, indicating where to find the main hotels and restaurants. When I was there, further up the way, in the main square, posters advertised the winter festival, and on the information center pamphlets show the main hiking routes and emergency telephone numbers. Black outlines of reindeer on decorations and thatched roofs

are easily recognizable by any tourist as signs of a rustic, outdoorsy, and cozy community. The “downtown” area is marked by the change in speed limit—a round sign marking 30 in a red circle. This sign is reinforced by a colorful three-foot tall sign in the maladroit strokes of children, clearly stating that it is a “zone 30”, decorated by several representations of mountainous landscapes and pedestrians.

It remains conveniently close to Flodoard, a large cosmopolitan city, and all the benefits which that city can offer, such as employment, hospitals, entertainment, and shopping. At a Sunday afternoon tea gathering with my own neighbors in Flodoard, one of them, a university professor, asked me how my work was coming along. I mentioned that I was doing ethnographic work in Combrayville, and left it at that, without sharing my impressions of the village so far. He told me exactly the same thing as everyone else who was involved with the village had told me: that it had grown immensely over the past decades as an idyllic place for people seeking housing nearby, while remaining reclusive and rustic. In numbers: from 285 in 1968 to 1,101 in 2012. The town populated 300 is centuries old, the bedroom community populated 1,100 is only a few decades old, a quiet place where a person can find quiet, alone with the mountain air. According to the people living there, property value has risen at least threefold.

My neighbor told me that very few other villages in the region had managed to attract new populations. Following the global trend to exodus from rural areas to urban areas, the surrounding villages were shrinking as their inhabitants found it financially unsustainable to remain distant from urban life. Combrayville, however, was close enough to the city for inhabitants to benefit from the urban setting. It had a reputation of affording the best of both worlds.

I had come to the village, initially, because a group of citizens in the French village were building “La Salle de les Gamelans”. This was to be a special place: a multifunctional community center that would bring together people of all sorts, from whatever background and accommodating any interest. It was founded under the assumption that people need to get together and share for a

community to thrive—*id est*, that social involvement is a necessary condition for the social capital in a community to flourish (Anderson & Jack, 2002).

C.3. D'Artagnan, November 17th

“D'Artagnan” is the name of the fourth and youngest member of the three musketeers, who in the novels is the first to invoke their famous motto, “one for all and all for one”. It is also the nickname of the long-haired, goateed clerk who operates Combrayville’s information desk. When asked by name if he would like to assist in an interview, he promptly smiled and stated in perfect English, “I’m only drinking beers here. I don’t know these people, I don’t know this place.”

I was on my way out of the town, had been waiting at the bus stop since 17:24, twenty minutes prior to the scheduled arrival at 17:44. Coming from hectic urban life, I have an innate distrust of traffic schedules. At 17:41, three minutes to the appointed time for the last bus down the mountain to pass, d'Artagnan appeared, ready for the bus to whisk us off. He approached me and asked about my day. The bus came, driven by the same bus driver I had seen on two other occasions that day, the closest I had come to building a relationship with a bus driver in over a decade. This bus driver, and his bus, had become somewhat “special” to me: that afternoon, in my amusement at going up the mountain to enter the field, I had forgotten my jacket on his bus. As luck would have it, I had managed to recognize him early in the afternoon as he drove his bus across the main square of Combrayville on his way back down the mountain. I flagged him down, found my coat, and stayed warm.

D'Artagnan was taking the last bus down the mountain to pick up some groceries in the city. He would take the 19:20 back up the mountain with his supplies. In exploring Combrayville, I had the impression that the grocery store was closed, but this was not the case. Far from it, he said. It was just that the grocer had his own time, and one couldn’t be sure when the store would be open. The grocer would do the deliveries and keep the books, while his wife ran the counter. The grocer, d'Artagnan told me with a wink, “is a *special* person.”

“A ‘special’ person?” I asked.

“You know,” d’Artagnan said, again with a grin and a wink, “some people are ‘special’²⁸.” He went on to tell me about how it took some patience to handle the grocer, how he would do things in his own time and his own way and could be somewhat gruff.

The young man was not born in Combrayville. His family was not from Combrayville. Two or three years prior, his girlfriend, with whom he shared a home, was sick (he did not specify with what) and they moved to the clear air in the mountains, away from the pollution in the city. As life would have it, his girlfriend left him, and he stayed at his apartment. He had found work in Combrayville, first working for the census, through which he met a great deal of the inhabitants of the village, and then at the ski station, where he met many more. He quite confidently claimed a good relationship with everyone in the village, backing his claim with another: that he talks with everybody. His good relationship with the community had led to him being hired to man the information center.

He made a point of saying that not everything is well in Combrayville, even though everyone says “hi” to everyone else in the street. Because he talked with everyone, he had a view of how different groups saw each other. He drew an invisible circle on the back of the seat in front of us with the tip of his finger, then drew an imaginary squiggle down the middle: there was a clear divide in the village. On the one side of the circle, there were the cosmopolitan newcomers and, on the other, the farm hands. From what I could gather from what he told me about what he had heard out and about, the farmers and farm hands felt that the newcomers thought they were above those who did manual labor, that they would never dirty their hands with work that was done manually. He described frustrations he had heard out and about: these people did not use the local businesses.

In the other camp, among the cosmopolitan newcomers who held office jobs in the nearby city, people who did research “like yourself”, he said, the opinion was that the farmhands and other

²⁸ A Frenchman unassociated with this case explained to me that the term “special” is used in France to indicate peculiarity, but devoid of the sense of a positive superlative indicated in English. This allows for a subtly euphemistic use of the word in common speech.

“original” inhabitants of Combrayville were too rough, and for this reason avoided contact with them. This town, he reiterated, was not what it seemed to be. Rather, it was divided, people didn’t get along as well as they should: it was “special”, he concluded.

I asked him where he was in this divided circle. He placed the tip of his finger right on the imaginary line. “I am here, in the middle. I guess that makes me ‘special’.”

Rumors are what went around, and he heard a lot of them. At first, he (at least acted like he) was resistant to pass on the rumors he had heard, because there was little substance to them. The current business owners in the town were old, and retirement was inevitable. The Tobacco shop owner, for example, had retired and no one had stepped up to open it again, but not for lack of rumors that *this time* someone would almost step up to run the store. Another one that went around, he told me, was about a new project that was being put together: “La Salle de les Gamelans”. People talked about it but weren’t sure what it was about. They had heard about a fab lab, where children could come to design and build machines. They also heard that the project was putting together a co-working space, where people could come to share a large office space, instead of going down the mountain to Flodoard or staying “cooped up” in their home offices. There was also talk about a brewery. People found it hard to grasp what La Salle de les Gamelans actually was and how it could bring these and other actions all together under one single project. What’s more, there was talk that they had received funding from somewhere high—the city council? The French government? Perhaps even the EU...? “Whatever it is,” he told me, “La Salle de les Gamelans is ‘special’.” Frenchmen, he explained, will always complain about something, especially when they feel that someone else is getting ahead of them. This got them talking a whole lot about La Salle de les Gamelans, questioning what made everyone think that it was so special it should get special funding.

D’Artagnan asked me where I am from, which is not a simple question to answer. I told him about how I was born in the United States, and then lived in Scotland, the Netherlands, and Brazil, because of the missionary work of my parents. Somehow I got to talking about how it was the little

things that made me miss each place when I left them behind: it was *gezellig* when you were there, and then left a sense of *saudades*, feelings so specific they were nearly impossible to explain, no matter how deep they went. “You are ‘special’!”, he declared.

By this point, the bus had slowed to a crawl, due to traffic. It seemed to me that it would be to my advantage to get off as soon as possible and walk the rest of the way. D’Artagnan called to his friend, the bus driver, and said that “his colleague” would like to get off the bus. I felt flattered he didn’t just call me “this guy”, though recognizing the casual way in which the French use the term “colleague”.

Right before I stepped off the bus, he requested that he be called “D’Artagnan” in my account.

C.4. Robert—October 12th to November 4th

My involvement with Combrayville started with a seminar on diversity which I attended. In a conversation with one of the presenters, I pointed out how interested I was in the role of place in the forming entrepreneurs’ social networks, and this scholar mentioned that she knew of a co-working space that was being built with funding in her village, Combrayville²⁹. She put me in touch with the Robert and Guylaine, the couple who was developing a project in the village, “La Salle de les Gamelans”.

Over a brief exchange of emails, where I quickly shared my interest in how social networks are formed, the husband, Robert, agreed to meet me in my own space. He happened to be in the neighborhood where I work in Flodoard, within very little time of when we began our exchange of messages, and he sent me an email letting me know that he was at the cafeteria. Since I had never seen him before, I ran a quick search on LinkedIn, where I found his photograph. I met him for a

²⁹ Disclosure of theoretical grounding is in order. In this conversation, we got to talking about Relational Sociology and Queer Theory. This is a telling clue regarding the theory which implicitly guided inquiry I develop in this paper. Relational Sociology is explicitly articulated throughout. Implicitly the situations at hand problematize “diversity” in the town, even if there is little consent among the informants about the contours of such diversity. My sensitivity towards “eccentricities” is an expansion of the identity difficulties that are described in Queer Theory (Halperin, 2003). The term “special” which is sprinkled throughout the paper is an echo of the formal and critical use of the term “queer”. I tentatively suggest that “special”, as used in this piece, is a superset of the meaning of “queer” in Queer Theory. The term is used here to emphasize the phenomenology of problematic eccentricities people deal with as they emerge in relationships.

quick conversation in the cafeteria about the purpose and state of their project. My main concern was the hurdles I would have to go through to secure access to the research site: what were their interests, how they saw my role as a researcher, how I could secure data which would be relevant for my own research, and basically convincing him and others at the site that my efforts would actually be to their interest at the lowest cost to them, all the while portraying myself as a personable, yet nonintrusive, fellow.

La Salle de les Gamelans, as he told me, was being built to bring people together. In their opinion, as he expressed it, there was a great divide throughout the village: there were many skilled people who could offer several useful resources for the community of Combrayville, but these people rarely, if ever, brought these skills and resources together into something constructive for the community. La Salle de les Gamelans would be a space where people could come and put new ideas together. Currently, from what he told me, they were building a fab lab, where children would design and construct machines, and a brewery, where citizens of Combrayville would bring their own ingredients and make their own beer.

I tentatively suggested that their difficulties would be in actually having people participate in the space, once it was put together. This, Robert assured me, was not their main concern. Many people in the community were already involved in building the project, so once it had secured the space, the people who were already participating would continue to participate. Their concern, however, was in securing the funding from the EU that had been promised: they needed to spend the money on renovating the space and acquiring the machines by the end of the year. Although I did not understand how I could help in this regard through my research, I popped the question anyway: would it be possible for me to tag along and observe them for my research? I expected to have a great deal of convincing yet to do. On the contrary, Robert was emphatic about their enthusiasm about me doing research with them: the role of space in the formation of social networks, they felt, was well within their own philosophy, and they felt that we were speaking the

same language. They invited me to simply show up, observe, and find my own role in the project as a researcher, simple as that. *Voilà*.

C.5. Camille—December 3rd

I showed up at Camille's home promptly at 9:30, having trudged through the first (and only) snow I saw in December of 2015, getting lost only twice in the byways of Combrayville. Her doorbell chimed the theme of a baroque piece, though I could only make an educated guess at who composed it. The house was a wooden cabin, the wood of a natural light yellow. A ladder gave access to the upper level. The couch in the living room faced a large window from where one can binge-watch an open field. If it weren't for the mountains that walled the village off, I would be able to see my house from here. As it was, I could peer through the space between the mountains at the tops of the pyramid-like peaks on the far side of the urban basin. Today's view of the field: whiteness. This living room doubled, often, as a psychotherapy clinic and a workshop training room, an alternative to her space down in Flodoard. We drank tea: she, green, I, black (which, from what I could gather from a fleeting look across her face, seemed a slight disappointment to her). We nibbled on *speculoos* cookies, which have a somewhat Proustian effect on me, invoking the grey and red graffiti-ridden subways in the Amsterdam of the 1980's. She tried to convince me that I should move my family to Combrayville: the mountain air would do my son good.

Camille had owned the house for nearly thirty years by the time we spoke. At first, it was her "second house", a place to go in ski season in the winter and a shelter from the city heat in the summer. After that, it became home. A farmer neighbor of hers told her recently, "why would you want to go away on holidays? It's already so beautiful here."

The world is entering a new economy, she told me, the sharing economy. The individualistic society is through. "Now, it's time to share. To share what you have, what you know. It's one of the reasons I chose this life. To bring a drop in the ocean of humanity." Now she lived more rustically. She shared organic foods produced locally with her next-door neighbor, who was a

farmer by night and an engineer in Flodoard by day. Choosing this life entailed renouncing an executive position in communications and marketing for a renowned multinational, where she would make 18 international trips by airplane per year, “discovering people all around Europe”.

When I tell my own special background as one who has lived in many places, many people react with surprise. Others nod with recognition of the names, and might comment on their own experience in the places I have lived. Camille is of the latter type, the ones who take my background as a variation of the travels they themselves have made through places they also know well.

She volunteers as the treasurer for La Salle de les Gamelans. One of their objectives is to be profitable. They will charge a yearly membership fee for participants in the village—15 Euros for individuals, and 35 Euros for families with more than three members. Additional charges will occur at events, such as the brewery, which will be ticketed, and at concerts and plays, where they will pass around a hat. The founder, Guylaine (Robert’s wife) will receive a salary as president of the project, paid for through the funds they will receive, some of which come from the EU.

She described to me a Combrayville which was teeming with activity. The children’s music workshop held in the town had the same amount of participants—over 100—as the same workshop had down the mountain, in the nearby town of Bourgeville, although Combrayville had only one tenth of that town’s population. There was basically an association for all activities imaginable, each of which meets regularly in members’ homes. Newcomers could quickly find their own niche, if they wanted to. Twice a year, they hold a festival where each association presents its activities and gathers email addresses to communicate their activities to those who are interested. This, she explained, does not unify the village; rather, it is another form of fragmentation. La Salle de les Gamelans, then, would crosscut these associations. Members of each association would be able to meet people in other associations through the activities held at La Salle de les Gamelans.

Other institutions could have the potential to bring people together, but it wasn’t happening, according to Camille. The school could bring together only the people who have children who go to the school—she, for example, was not privy to what was going on at the school. There once had

been a café where people of all sorts would meet at the upper edge of the village, years before, but the owner had retired, and the café had closed down. No one goes to the church, except for Christmas mass. Even so, the priest had retired and only celebrated mass on special occasions. It was up to La Salle de les Gamelans to bring people together, directing the skills in each diverse group back into the community.

There was a great divide in the village, as she saw it: the older generation and the new generation did not interact much. La Salle de les Gamelans was already working hard at bringing the young and the old together. An opportunity had appeared in the summer, and they exploited it to its fullest. The farmers needed to take their sheep up the mountain to graze, as is the custom every year, the “Transeamus”. La Salle de les Gamelans spread the word through posters and word-of-mouth, bringing together 200 people from the village of all ages to help take the sheep to pasture. It culminated in a collective picnic celebration at the mountain top where people of all ages could be together.

Their way of doing things was not so much resisted, as misunderstood. Misunderstandings, as she understood it, could be overcome through communication. She gave the example of Louis Colpeyn, the owner of the café across from where La Salle de les Gamelans was being set up. He had misgivings because he saw the brewery as competition. She said that the president of La Salle de les Gamelans, Guylaine, approached the café and talked things out. First, Guylaine explained to them that beer would only be sold at the times of the meetings of the brewery, and not all the time. Second, they thought together about how they could work things out. The owner of the café then saw value in promoting the beer produced in the town: tourists would buy the local beer. As Camille described it, some open communication and creative thinking, mutual agreements could be found that improved things for everybody—the sharing economy thrives.

Camille made a point of saying that Guylaine, as well as the rest of the collegiate of volunteers that lead the project, are “positive”. Because they are “positive”, things were coming together. The

deadline to make the renovations and purchase materials by the end of December simply was not feasible, due to the holidays. Thankfully, they had received a two-week extension.

I did not understand what she meant with positive. “We have all positive thinking, so everything is coming as we want,” she went on to explain. “We don’t have any doubt, we believe it will work. It’s what I teach as a coach. Everything is energy. You give an information, and it becomes hard.” The tea spoons clinked in the cups as she tapped the coffee table. “Your thoughts are the same: you give the information, and it materializes.”

She paused for a second, and then told me that there was one person on the board that at times was not a positive person. I asked how they relate to this special person on their team. “We say to him, ‘no! You must *think positive!*’ And we *make* him be positive!”

There was a pink Himalayan salt crystal lamp on the shelf against the wall behind her. From my vantage point during our conversation, it seemed to perch on her shoulder. To the left, just out of my sight, a painting with mandalas representing chakras loomed beside the large window. I mentioned to her that I had noticed a man-sized Buddha on the porch of a house on my way up the mountain.

“I think people here are more open minded,” she told to me. “In one way, we say we are... do you know *bobo*, what it means? It’s a people who want to live different in society. They are a little bit richer, they eat organic food. [...] We are more like that, it’s true. That’s why La Salle de les Gamelans works well. But we say, ‘we should not be just the *bobo*, we should bring more people as well. [...] We don’t want to be only *bobo*, we want to be everyone. But we bring our way of being.”

In fact, I had already been introduced to the word by Guylaine. The president of La Salle de les Gamelans had told me, with a wink, “The *bobo*, they are alternative people who have ‘special’ ideas.”

C.6. Guylaine—November 17th

I knew who Guylaine was as soon as I saw her, because I had looked her up on LinkedIn and Google. She looked just as her photo said she would look.

As we spoke, she had difficulty finding the words she wanted to use to reach the intuition she wanted to share. Although she could speak English quite well, it was arduous for her to express herself completely. Expecting that she would need to say only a few words in French to get back on track in English, I suggested that she simply say what she wanted to in whatever language seemed easier. Guylaine broke into French often from then on, first testing the limits of my French skills, and then comfortably settling into a mix of French and English. As for myself, although I was smiling and accommodating, I was far from comfortable with the situation; I was deeply aware of the foreign territory I was in and the pitfalls into which I could trip. While on the one hand I encouraged her to share her thoughts, I constantly needed to stop the natural flow of her conversation and retread to check understanding. For example, at one moment, we had to pause the conversation so she could explain to me what a particular key word meant. She started to give an elaborate definition of the term. The conclusion: the French word /kɔwɔʁkiŋ/ (“co-working”), corresponded to the English word /'kɒw'wɜrkɪŋ/ (“co-working”). Understanding was not impossible, perhaps because, on the one hand, I am fluent in another latin language and have been able to pick up some French since I arrived and, on the other, she seems accustomed to speaking slower, with a “vanilla” vocabulary, for foreigners, so we could meet, if not halfway, at least in “proximate territory”. While I took my espresso black and sugarless, she would fill her miniscule spoon with sugar, and dip it only so far into the cup that the it would turn brown and moist.

Guylaine had grown up in a region which currently is part of France, though control of the region has been known to alternate between France and Germany. Like Camille, she had done time in a corporate job. Unlike her, she was quite vocal about her frustrations with that life. As a person of the mountains, she looked for a job in Flodoard, which is known for its mountainous terrain. She and her husband, Robert, finally ended up in Combrayville. “In this village there are many nice

people, so we have our whole life here. This is why we wanted to make this project, so I can have my job here, to make a place where people can work together and do things together and not always go to Flodoard and make these things in Flodoard.”

Many people in Combrayville do go down the mountain during the day, a long string of cars trailing down the mountainside, headlights shining through the crisp morning air. I had watched the morning traffic roar past the school in the few minutes of motor noise. I later watched the evening traffic snake its way back up, lighting up the road in a blaze as they sped around the center square, right before the night-time quiet fell like a blanket.

“That’s the problem of villages like this one. We are so close to Flodoard and so it’s so easy to drive down and make this and so this village perhaps twenty years ago there were many services and commerce, stores, factories, ski factory, another one, I don’t know the word, there was an activity. But now many, most of the people go down to work every day. In the day there are tourists, when it’s sunny like today. During the day, it’s dead. Not in the evening, on the weekend, people like to stay here, a lot of activities for children and adults, but during the week, it’s really, really quiet. Too quiet.”

Three years before, in what she considered to be before the beginning of what came to be La Salle de les Gamelans, she had an intuition about the resources available throughout the community of Combrayville. As a parent, she met many people through the village’s school, and soon became fascinated by all the people in Combrayville, her neighbors. She started to imagine some form of space where people could meet and “keep local work, local dynamic, something people can share together, where they live together. [...] The game is to bring together the interests and the competences which are different into a multifaceted project.”

After nearly a year of pondering her idea, the project began with a meeting with various people she had shared the notion with, themed, “How to live well together”. She considers this the true beginning because the nature of the project is one of collaboration, and not of direction by a central leader. They began holding such brainstorming meetings on a regular basis, every Tuesday

evening at 20:30, resulting in the projects I have described above, among others. The current discussions were about La Salle de les Gamelans as a container. The question currently was, “What can you put into it?”

Guylaine told me their informal motto was “*C’est possible!*” “If I have an idea of what could be done at the factory, we never say, ‘no, we can’t do it.’ We say, ‘yes, it’s possible.’” However, they use what she referred to as “*management consentement*” in meetings. When a proposal is made, they do a round robin where each person brings up faults and objections to the idea. They then adapt the proposal to the objections which were raised, followed by another round robin. When they feel that the project has been improved to the participants’ satisfaction, it is approved. “*Par un meilleur connaissance les an des autre. Respect que les autres son diffèrent aussi,*” I understood she had said. “The differences complement each other. When they all come together they are an ecosystem. The village is like the world. It’s a great challenge to see the person as *gens*.”

Holding this conversation (as well as transcribing it), was quite a struggle for myself, as I believe it was also a challenge for her to adapt her thoughts to my ability to understand her.

She stressed that La Salle de les Gamelans is different from what she had imagined. “*C’est dans le monde*. It has become concrete. I thought it would only be a place for relaxing and shared resources. It meets a true need of the population now.” Her understanding of projects is that the objective guides the actions, but what is truly important is the course that leads somewhere. In the end, according to her, the result might end up being different from the original objective, but it would still be a success if the course is respected—enjoyed, even—as a team.

Because of this view, she has conflict with one of the project leaders at La Salle de les Gamelans. According to her, he considers the project he leads to be his dream, and has a firm idea of what the end product should be. When talking about this, she argued with me, although I said nothing to the contrary, insisting that a narrow view of the project could stifle it. She said this while drawing an invisible, sinuous path with her hands over the table, past the coffee cups, paper and pen. She said it was difficult to make him understand.

As we discussed the involvement of each project leader, I noted that none of them were natives from Combrayville. She stopped a moment and smiled at my provocation. She conceded: this was an issue. “This is not simple. Some of the old inhabitants support the project, to build the project. Others are not so motivated. They are a bit scared.” She then proceeded to tell me about her difficult relationship with Louis, the owner of the café across the street from the location where La Salle de les Gamelans would be set up. He was worried about the competition, since the café was also a place to relax, and especially because he had heard that they would make and serve beer. Sometime the year before, according to Guylaine, he ranted at her for half an hour about the problems they were bringing to his business. Since then, she kept having coffee there, but he would never exchange words with her.

It just so happened that we were having our coffee and conversation at this very same café. As I talked with her about who I would like to interview in Combrayville, I said I was interested in talking with someone who was resistant, like, perhaps, the owner of the café. “If you want,” she suggested, “we can ask him some questions just now. Could be interesting, for me also.”

C.7. M. & Mme. Colpeyn—November 17th

The plan was for me to interview Louis, while Guylaine translated for me. We walked up to the bar, as we would have to anyway, to pay for the coffee we had consumed (for which Guylaine insisted on paying). At the bar, a regular with long black hair and a goatee, not unlike the classic image of a musketeer, was enjoying a beer and talking with who I thought was the waitress. I explained in my poor French that I was a researcher interested in studying relationships in Combrayville, and that I wanted to interview Louis. I told the *habitué* that he was welcome to join in if he wanted, and he said he didn’t know anything, that he didn’t know these people, and that he was only drinking a beer. The young woman called Louis over, and soon we were engaged in a conversation, the four of us, with D’Artagnan piping in occasionally as a fifth participant.

The French now was much more difficult to follow than during my conversation with Guylaine. Now that I was outnumbered, one foreigner to three or four French people, they spoke quickly and in the comfort of the local accents and turns of phrases. Though Louis was smiling like someone who is running a business is supposed to, he kept a hand on his hip and swung a rag over his shoulder, leaning in at times and beginning to raise his voice. The waitress, who I quickly learned was Louis' wife, Fabienne, seemed to weigh in more directly, also keeping a hand on her hip and gesturing widely with her other hand. Although the young woman had been kindly and attentive before, she now spoke with a strong, deep voice, like peals of thunder.

I asked them what they knew about La Salle de les Gamelans. The answer was that the first place to go is the church and the café. They stated that the café had the weight of tradition, and that six families frequented the place. Elderly people would come in the morning, and workers would come in during the afternoon. In the evenings and on the weekends, young people would come in from Flodoard and Bourgeville. Ten years before, the only people to come by were those who had always lived in Combrayville. It used to be that when there was a funeral, people would go to the church for the service, and then would cross the street and meet for beers at the café. Things had changed. Mrs. Colpeyn said that her friends and others her age couldn't afford to stay in Combrayville, and had left. People had gotten old and retired. Now that there was the internet, people didn't come to the café as often. The new generation didn't seem to come around. But, regarding La Salle de les Gamelans, they said that they had seen a piece about it in the recent edition of the village newspaper. People, according to them, were not sure what the project was, essentially, since there were such diverse activities.

At this point, Guylaine simply responded to their statements, without turning around and translating for me. From what I could gather, she was describing to them what the project's proposal and purpose was. The bar was on a small platform, which made Guylaine, who was already not very tall, a very small person speaking sharply in defense of her project. M. & Mme. Colpeyn rained down their misgivings about La Salle de les Gamelans, in light of what they had heard. I

was obviously not part of the conversation anymore. Now, I was merely someone making an audio recording of heated French words shot across the bar. I turned to d'Artagnan and asked, “what is going on here?”, a question he did not answer. Rather, he claimed he did not know these people or what was happening and then excused himself.

When I got a chance to ask another question, I asked M. & Mme. Colpeyn what they thought La Salle de les Gamelans could do for the village. They said that the project should focus on bringing more people up from the city, which would benefit all the businesses. Because they directed themselves to me and spoke slowly and with gestures, I understood. At this moment, I felt myself “slip” out of my role as a researcher, and into one that was of greater ease for myself, given my years of professional experience as a career counselor and clinical psychologist prior to undertaking a PhD. I asked, in my best, heavily accented French, if I could step up behind the bar and stand with them: “*je peux?*”, followed by a gesture for “walking over there”. They laughed good-humoredly (was this professional affability or amusement?), and gestured that I was welcome. From behind the bar, now there were three people looking down at Guylaine. I asked her “*que’st que-ce que La Salle de les Gamelans peut faire pour ici?*”, an attempt at asking what her project could do for the café. She said that the project would bring more villagers downtown, which meant the café would have more business. I then stepped down and stood next to Guylaine. I asked M. & Mme. Colpeyn what they thought they could do for La Salle de les Gamelans. They said they didn’t have the time to help out, because managing the restaurant took so much of their own time.

I thanked them for their time, and asked permission to take a picture of the antique photo of Combrayville they had on their wall, of villagers on a dirt road near the church, standing among several cattle.

At the end of the day, I returned alone to the café for had a beer and to write up my field notes. Mme. Colpeyn brought their small one-year-old in from daycare. M. Colpeyn carried him around his establishment, juggling time with his offspring and family with managing his work, and

smiled a big, proud smile. I knew that smile well. I played the same way with my own one-year-old son and smiled just as proud.

C.8. La Salle de les Gamelans—November 17th

As Guylaine and I walked around the space that was to become La Salle de les Gamelans, she continued to speak in French, and vented her frustration with the people at the café. So many people were spreading rumors about La Salle de les Gamelans, especially at the café. She wished that Louis would understand that they were “in different gardens”, and that they would clearly not interfere with each other, as she saw it.

La Salle de les Gamelans had so much in its mission and vision about working with diversity, with bringing in what people were passionate about, with “following the way” more than “fighting to reach the objective”. Surely their philosophy would have something to say to find a solution to this situation. What inspiration could be found in La Salle de les Gamelans? Could they embrace the other side’s position and see them as “*gens*”, develop a better knowledge of the “*other*”? She simply stated that rumors and resistance would only be dispelled once more projects rolled out and became part of the village’s routine. Once it was performing, she would show them.

Given their history, and the way the conversation quickly exploded, I wondered what she had expected would come from the conversation when she suggested we go talk to them then and there. Was she frustrated? No, she told me: she was very pleased with the outcome. She was simultaneously frustrated and pleased, two feelings which, until that moment, I had thought were mutually exclusive. She was pleased that she had managed to break the silence between them both and re-initiated a conversation, because now she would work on what would work for the two of them. She knew now that she had to show that the brewery would work only on Monday nights. In the midst of words which they had flung across the bar and that I could barely understand, M. & Mme. Colpeyn had expressed interest in selling the new locally brewed beer: cheap production, high quality, lucrative pricing. I would later hear again about this victory, as Camille celebrated the power of communication. It had been a special moment for Combrayville.