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Studying entrepreneurial project: opportunities and new avenues in the field of entrepreneurship research

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Summary

This paper is based on a special issue of the French “Revue de l’Entrepreneuriat” (2011, forthcoming) focusing on the theme of the entrepreneurial project. At the end of this issue, we consider the place of the project in entrepreneurship research. Then we propose some opportunities and new avenues for future research. This paper recounts the principal ideas put forward.

Résumé

Ce papier repose sur un dossier que nous avons proposé dans la Revue de l’Entrepreneuriat sur le thème « Projet et entrepreneuriat ». A l’issue de ce dossier, nous avons émis plusieurs constats sur la place que peut prendre le projet dans les recherches en entrepreneuriat. Nous avons identifié également des opportunités pour les travaux futurs. La contribution suivante reprend les principaux éléments mis en avant.

Introduction

Research that combines project management and entrepreneurship is rare. With the exception of Lindgren and Packendorff (2003) who suggest a “project-based view of Entrepreneurship”¹, few researchers are studying the interface between entrepreneurship and project.

Nevertheless, it would seem logical to associate the notion of project with that of entrepreneurship. If we limit entrepreneurship to enterprise creation, then we are speaking about the entrepreneur’s project: the way the project is conceived; the way in which the network is mobilized in order to construct the project; how the entrepreneur is supported in bringing the project to a successful conclusion; the conception of the project as opposed to the running of the business, etc. It is this empirical fact that forms the basis of this paper and which basically explains the recent emergence of the notion of project in French entrepreneurship research (Barès and Jacquot, 2009; Bernasconi, 2008; Bréchet et al., 2009; Condor, 2002; Condor and Hachard, 2007; Emin and Schieb-Bienfait, 2007; François, 2009; de La Ville, 2001; Paturel, 2007; Schmitt, 2006, 2007; Schmitt and Bayad, 2008).

The development of this research calls for a reflection on the place that project research should occupy within the domain of entrepreneurship, and on its prospects for the next five to ten years. Firstly, we believe it is necessary to position the entrepreneurial project in comparison with the different entrepreneurship paradigms. Does the project approach constitute a new paradigm, alongside those illustrated in the literature (Verstraete and Fayolle, 2005; Jaziri, 2009)? As a discipline, entrepreneurship is in the pre-paradigm phase (Bygrave, 1989). Therefore, does the entrepreneurial project have a role to play in this paradigm quest that is currently at the forefront of debate?

Secondly, in project terms, the entrepreneurial project ought to have a finite characteristic. Yet, it is not always easy to identify the end of an entrepreneurial project. Is entrepreneurship a succession of unconnected projects, each of which must be successful (Bernasconi, 2008)? Is it a process whereby there are temporary entrepreneurial phases, followed by operational phases? Is it possible to sustain a process that is perpetually in the entrepreneurial phase? Are we dealing with an unattainable projection which thus never ends (Boutinet and Raveleau, 2011) and which constantly reinvents itself by controlling its resources and its actors (Bréchet and Schieb-Bienfait, 2011)?

Thirdly, how is it possible, empirically speaking, to understand entrepreneurial situations through the entrepreneurial project? Failure to answer this question would quickly lead to researchers abandoning research into entrepreneurial project. There is no doubt that entrepreneurial project research is complex and necessitates the researcher working in close contact with the entrepreneur and preferably in real life situations.

Finally, the entrepreneurial project reveals some unusual themes in entrepreneurship that are often minimized or even completely forgotten. It is for this reason that we have included the somewhat unusual contributions of Boutinet and Raveleau (2011), but also of Lindgren and Packendorff (2011). We have chosen to consider the darker side of entrepreneurship. This is based on certain project management studies, as well as on the problems of SME managers

¹ A concept also used by the French researchers Bréchet and Desreumaux (2008)

identified by Torrès (2009). Thus, the entrepreneurial project encourages the research community to take into account the suffering experienced by the “enterprising” actor.

We will develop these points in the text that follows in order to initiate their debate within the entrepreneurial project research community.

1. The perspective of the “project” as an artefact in the quest for the entrepreneurial paradigm

The project perspective in entrepreneurship seems unusual. Although it fits into the different characteristics of the four entrepreneurship paradigms, as identified by Verstraete and Fayolle (2005), it also exceeds each one of them. It would be tempting to consider the project perspective as a meta-paradigm. Indeed, Paturel (2007) considers it to be a paradigm in its own right.

However, on reading the different contributions to the special edition of the French publication “Revue de l’Entrepreneuriat”, we have formed a different opinion. We see the entrepreneurial project as both a completing and completed artefact, which allows us to go forward in the search for the entrepreneurial paradigm. Rather than an answer, it seems to us to be a “means” by which it is possible to go beyond the positions already established by the different entrepreneurial paradigms.

1.1 Entrepreneurial project and the entrepreneurship paradigms

We will set out briefly below the four main entrepreneurship paradigms identified by Verstraete and Fayolle (2005), in order to examine their link to the entrepreneurial project.

1.1.1 Entrepreneurial project, new value creation and innovation

The new value creation paradigm and the innovation paradigm² are both very important today in the entrepreneurship literature. The principle of the dialogic relationship, which links the individual to new value creation, suggests a complex construction, which allows us to understand that the entrepreneur develops as a result of his actions and that value is a specific product of these actions. The problem, though, is that this is based exclusively on methodological individualism (Avenier and Schmitt, 2008; Emin and Schieb-Bienfait, 2007). Although the new value creation paradigm envisages, at best, entrepreneurial teams, it nevertheless leaves very little opportunity for other stakeholders. The entrepreneurial project is, by nature, a relational process (de La Ville, 2001), a process that relies on social interactions to elicit the distinctive skills, which are at the source of innovation. The entrepreneurial project is the mainstay of the creation of entrepreneurial skills (Barès et al., 2011). Thus, Emin and Schieb-Bienfait (2007) prefer the project approach, which they regard as less simplistic and which has the advantage of considering entrepreneurship as a channel to a collective project that mobilizes a “complex” methodological individualism (Bréchet, 2008). This perspective leads us to understand that although individuals are the basis of collectives, these collectives prove to be more complex than the individuals who produced them. We

² Verstraete and Fayolle (2005) argue that, as an entrepreneurship paradigm, innovation is different from new value creation, essentially because of the writings of the Austrian economist, Schumpeter, and because of their importance to other authors in the entrepreneurship literature. But, on a more fundamental basis, it can be considered that the innovation paradigm is a special case.

know today how much the transformation of inventions into social utilities depends on the position that the stakeholders are likely to take and that the entrepreneur allows them to take (Asquin et al., 2007). This is doubtless one of the possible contributions of the entrepreneurial project to the new value creation paradigm.

1.1.2 Entrepreneurial project and business opportunity

Studies carried out on business opportunity struggle to show a clear representation of the creative process, mainly because opportunity does not necessarily pre-exist a business, but can be constructed during the course of a process (Chabaud and Messeghem, 2010). The entrepreneurial project, feared like a forthcoming operation (Boutinet, 1990; Condor, 2002; Filion, 1991; Schmitt, 2006), extends the process of opportunity detection, thus giving a more complete vision of entrepreneurship.

The entrepreneurial project also allows us to understand the projection that the entrepreneur makes at the initial stage of opportunity identification. This forms the beginning of the process of opportunity construction and highlights the importance of the entrepreneur's strategic skills in the business opportunity paradigm.

The project initiator's motivation is not sufficiently highlighted in the research into business opportunity. The study of the aims of the entrepreneurial phenomenon is not well developed in the entrepreneurship literature (Avenier and Schmitt, 2008). In addition to its evolving and co-constructive characteristics (Boutinet's notion of the "soft project"), the entrepreneurial project is also the extension of the entrepreneur's own personal project, an element which the business opportunity paradigm does not take sufficiently into account. The project approach thus goes beyond this paradigm, starting with a project idea, which is much more than the simple discovery of an opportunity.

1.1.3 Entrepreneurial project and organization creation

The organization creation paradigm has numerous sources, but we are going to refer to this paradigm principally through the works of Gartner (1988, 1995) who emphasises organizational emergence. The concept of organizational emergence allows us to broach other situations above and beyond enterprise creation. There is no doubt that this perspective promotes the project approach. Organizational emergence can be endogenous to an enterprise that is already constituted and, in this situation, structuring takes place by way of the project. Moreover, Boutinet and Raveleau (2011) view Gartner as one of the first entrepreneurial project theoreticians.

However, the organization creation paradigm suffers from "vertigo" and this may cause its "mise en abyme"³ from a methodological viewpoint. For example, if it is necessary to consider organizational emergence before the organization, how do you regard this organizational emergence "*when emergence is the essential part which activates the organization and is already an organizational phenomenon in its own right*" (Bréchet and Schieb-Bienfait, 2011). For these authors, this is an opportunity to appraise the complexity of organizational phenomena through a theoretical pluralism.

³ It is generally accepted that there is no translation for this French term. The idea is that of a Russian doll or in this case a paradigm within a paradigm, but there is also with the "abyss" or some sort of degeneration, hence the vertigo imagery.

The entrepreneurial project allows organizational emergence to be considered from an artificial perspective (Schmitt and Bayad, 2008; Avenier and Schmitt, 2008). As far as the entrepreneur is concerned, the entrepreneurial project is a cognitive artefact. It helps to structure the entrepreneurial problem and to get the entrepreneur started. *“The entrepreneurial project can be considered as a heuristic technique to help entrepreneurs construct and tackle the situations in which they develop”* (Schmitt and Bayad, 2005, p.5). Boutinet and Raveleau suggest in their paper that *“the result is subordinate to the questioning beforehand”*. But beyond the conception stage, the entrepreneurial project becomes a translation aid (Callon and Latour, 1991), an actual “language” between the entrepreneur and the stakeholders who will take part in the structuring phase, and which facilitates knowledge exchange. This ability to dialogue with the stakeholders is obviously necessary at the new value creation and innovation stages, but equally so at the construction and identification of entrepreneurial opportunity phases.

1.2 Entrepreneurial project as a framework for paradigmatic development

We have just seen how the entrepreneurial project could exceed each of the opposing paradigms, without actually contravening any of them. But in what way could the entrepreneurial project provide a link that would serve as a means of dialogue between these paradigms? In their study, Verstraete and Fayolle (2005) show that the different paradigms share a process perspective. They identify “novelty” as a link between the paradigms that *“would establish the first sign of a progression past the pre-paradigm stage”* (ibid, p.45).

The concept of “the entrepreneurial project” would seem to contribute to this progress. Thus, Lindgren and Packendorff’s (2001) “process-based view” shows the fundamental associations between the two notions of project and entrepreneurship, beyond their distinctive individual characteristics. Even though not all the authors contributing to this special edition give the same meaning to the project concept, they do agree on a common foundation, presented here by Bréchet and Schieb-Bienfait: *“the abundance of creative activity transformed into reality, the affinity with novelty creation”* is a central element of both a project and of entrepreneurship.

Perceived as a novelty creation process, the entrepreneurial project could be a framework allowing the weaving of links between the different entrepreneurship paradigms, links that will help to promote a unifying paradigm. The entrepreneurial project would be a “transitional object” in entrepreneurship, so that everyone can move towards a paradigm without fear of losing sight of his or her basic points of reference.

Boutinet and Raveleau (2011) regard the entrepreneurial project as an action rather than an organizational project. Thus, in this special edition, they suggest that *“more than just pursuing the aims, (entrepreneurial projects) are continually energizing and reorienting the dynamic of a creative action, which appears in a place of collective production and cooperation”*. For these authors the entrepreneurial project differs from other types of project by the importance it attributes to negotiation and cooperation. This representation of entrepreneurship through the entrepreneurial project makes it possible to *“problematize the entrepreneurial phenomenon”* (Bréchet and Schieb-Bienfait, 2011). In the end, in the novelty creation process, it is the “project” perspective that plays the essential roles of impetus and of organization organising.

According to Schmitt and Bayad (2005), entrepreneurial project should serve as an artefact to the entrepreneurship research community, which should aid the construction of representations of the entrepreneurial phenomenon, and build a language making it possible to exchange knowledge between the different paradigms.

2. The unending nature of the entrepreneurial project at the heart of its identity?

Traditionally, a project is finite. We see from studies on project management that it is inconceivable to launch a project without an identifiable delivery deadline. Besides the legal contracts which depend on this deadline, it also structures the work and motivates the project team, and all of this in a perspective of heightened competition, whether real or constructed (Auregan and Joffre, 2004).

However, Boutinet and Raveleau (2011) question the reality of this finiteness. For these authors, certain projects are perpetual, without any real end, and this is particularly the case for the entrepreneurial project. This has two principal consequences:

- On the one hand, the end of a project is perhaps not as specific and therefore not as decisive a factor as the traditional project literature would have us believe. Planning a project is not just a technical outcome. It is also the product of a social construct or a power struggle. By setting a project deadline, it is possible to coordinate forces, to remain within the clients' budgetary constraints or the financial procedures imposed by a bank; but it is also symbolic. If the "reality" of the end of a project is put into perspective, we can consider that the project itself continues, notably in order to achieve its aims, and these can be separated from the deadlines decided at the planning phase.
- On the other hand, this would mean putting the entrepreneurial project back into the context of the other projects that currently interest the entrepreneurship research community (enterprise creation and acquisition, intrapreneurship...). But once the unending nature of the entrepreneurial project is accepted, what are we talking about? Are we at the enterprise creation or acquisition stage indefinitely? Obviously, this is questionable... unless the entrepreneurial project cannot be reduced to these descriptions of enterprise creation or acquisition, but refers to a much bigger programme. Depending on the level of analysis, some projects can in themselves be considered as successive periods within the scope of a wider programme, with the programme itself having no clear outcome. After each project the networks and the actors remain to a greater or lesser extent. In fact, many projects continue after their theoretical end date, which in itself creates numerous problems for the project actors who remain mobilized although they are officially involved in other new projects (Asquin et al., 2007). Therefore, acceptance of the infinite nature of the entrepreneurial project requires empirical corroboration, without which it may seem to be a concept without substance, and thus of little interest to either professionals or researchers.

As Garel (2003) suggests, "*project work is no longer the prerogative of a few specialist engineers*". This activity represents "*a typical form of modern culture*" (Joly and Muller, 1994) or even of modern capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999; Boutinet, 2010). Project temporality has often been evoked in the literature, particularly that which places project in the postmodern era (Aurégan and Joffre, 2004; Boutinet, 2006; Hazebroucq and Badot, 1996).

But the finiteness of a project is evaded, the researchers being unable to break with the prevailing views.

For Aurégan and Joffre (2004) as well as for Boutinet (2006), the project comes within the scope of the postmodern era and is characterised by tribalism, “zapping” and a certain relationship with time. Managed by and for a group of individuals, the project and notably the entrepreneurial project also provides a tool for structuring the group. Membership of a group is nevertheless tenuous due to the significant effect of individualism and the continual passing from one project to another. Moreover, the postmodern era emphasizes the present and refuses to acknowledge the past. Looking ahead does obviously exist, but in order to better organise the present (Boutinet, 2006). Perceived by some as an expression of existentialism or utopia, in the end, the project becomes a tool for structuring the present time.

Boutinet and Raveleau (2011) break away from the finite characteristic of the entrepreneurial project. Nevertheless, they suggest that this type of project would be “*absolutely appropriate for managing the temporary, provisional, and even ephemeral aspects. In this sense, the entrepreneurial project is indicative of postmodern culture...*” (Boutinet and Raveleau, 2011). Thus, despite a move away from the established view of finiteness, we glimpse a certain continuity of the postmodern logic. How do we explain that? Are we looking at a major break with temporality, which would mean a radical change in mentality? Or are we faced with incremental innovation, which does not reflect the transition to a new modernity?

For Boutinet and Raveleau (2011) the entrepreneurial project has no end. But does that mean that an end is not planned or at least envisaged? The entrepreneurial project gets its interminable characteristic from the “*resumption of the project*”, which occurs before the project has even finished. Researchers suggest that the entrepreneurial project can be planned and that the successive resumption of the project -that we associate with minor or major revisions of the said project (time period, cost, scope)- means that the project is never-ending. In this way, the project remains a projective activity. On the other hand, the process is perpetually in motion and the final aims are continually being reassessed.

Researchers also have to question the utility of a “programmed” end. Is this useful if the project is in perpetual motion? Would finiteness not reflect an analytical approach where time is intermittent, whereas the entrepreneurial project evokes a complex approach? Is this not just one more reason to be critical concerning project management tools, in particular the planning of tasks? This theme merits a place on the research agenda and thus some critical analysis.

3. Entrepreneurial project in real life situations

The entrepreneurial project is one of the concepts in entrepreneurship that is not easy to grasp, just like vision, skills, intention or even opportunity. The project is universal but, nevertheless, difficult to define. In the different contributions to this special edition, the entrepreneurial project seems to be a decisive factor in the activity, which is not without consequences from a methodological point of view. According to Lièvre and Rix (2011), it is about considering “*what the actors do and how they do it*”, and doing this in real life situations.

From a methodological point of view, the classical approaches of observation and comprehension are of little help. It is advisable, therefore, to return to the ‘black box’ of the project and the project sponsor. However, the field of management science does not seem to be particularly well armed to tackle the entrepreneurial project, and risks falling into oversimplification when faced with complex situations. Martinet (2000) suggests the development of a scientific excursionism that would bring about an examination of the means by which we investigate the entrepreneurial project. From this point of view, disciplines like anthropology, sociology and also ergonomics would provide a number of interesting avenues for research into the entrepreneur in a real life situation. The current methodological deficiency, with regard to the entrepreneurial project, limits and even impoverishes today’s knowledge of the entrepreneurship domain. At the moment, entrepreneurship research is like the story of the drunkard who searches for his keys under the street lamp, simply because it is here that there is light to do so (Le Moigne, 1990). According to the different contributions in this special themed edition, there are a number of ways of tackling the entrepreneurial project. This paragraph attempts to highlight some of the possible areas of research into the entrepreneurial project, and these methodological areas can be grouped under two themes, as follows:

- **Intelligibility of the situations to be managed.** This point brings us to the need to model the entrepreneurial project through the representations of the entrepreneurs (Avenier and Schmitt, 2009). As Fillion (1999) highlights “*one of the big differences between the entrepreneur and the other actors who work in the organization is that the entrepreneur defines the object that will determine his own future*”. The complexity of the entrepreneurial project, characterized by the interactions between the different elements of the project, leads to different representations of the project. It seems to be important to make the entrepreneurial project as explicit as possible, in order to promote the form of the project and its participation with the different stakeholders. Therefore, it is a matter of making explicit the points of view that the researcher intends to represent, in other words, to model in order to connect together and to act. Modelling promotes the development of a common language between the entrepreneur, the stakeholders involved in the entrepreneurial project and the researcher. In this case, the researcher plays the role of a facilitator.
- **The place and the role of the researcher.** The entrepreneurial project is very much concerned with the place of the researcher in the project. During the course of his research, the researcher may participate in the construction of the project or in the understanding of the project. In this last case, it is not possible to be limited solely to the project sponsor. The project is, by nature, something that is constructed and therefore complex. If we accept the idea that the entrepreneurial project should be intelligible, this would suggest that the intervention of at least one third party, like a researcher, is necessary in order to help express this understanding. The researcher uses methods to facilitate modelling and to allow the depiction of entrepreneurial project representations. Thus the researcher’s role is to translate the different languages used (Schmitt, 2007). The methods used can be written, spoken⁴ and

⁴ Rix (2007) describes various techniques such as self-confrontation developed by Theureau (1992) within the scope of a theoretical course of action; crossed self-confrontation developed by Clot (1999) from a psychological analysis and work processing perspective; explanatory interview (Vermersch 1994) and *subjective re-situ* interview (Rix and Biache, 2004).

visual⁵. The stance taken by the researcher considerably modifies his place in the research, going from excluded-third-party to included-third-party.

In the end, the methodologies suggested in this special themed edition promote a collective, introspective and projective approach linked to the entrepreneurial project. The entrepreneurial project cannot just be limited to questioning the project sponsors. It is necessary to go further back into the ‘black box’ in order to work not just on a single reality, or an objective reality objectivized by the researcher, but to consider the reality that is experienced (Schmitt, 2009) by the different stakeholders. The objective must be to construct intelligible representations of the entrepreneurial project, in order to facilitate the heuristic⁶ reasoning for the entrepreneurs’ actions.

4. The suffering revealed by the entrepreneurial project

In some ways, the project method takes us back to the idea of a utopia, in which there is an absence of bureaucracy in the enterprise and where responsible and autonomous individuals muster their own best skills, so that the enterprise increases its level of performance to a new high (Boutinet and Raveleau, 2011). In this way, the project method leads to a hybridisation of the principles of bureaucracy and entrepreneurship (Ford and Randolph, 1992).

Therefore, certain enterprises that organise their work by project offer their employees a myth. The project myth is that everyone has a duty to be fully committed to the project, since the future of the project determines the future of the enterprise and that of its employees. By staging David Packard’s famous little garage at Palo Alto, Hewlett Packard constructed the “12 rules of the garage”⁷. The rules attempt to encapsulate the work ethos of Hewlett Packard. They refer to the ability of everyone to believe that he can do anything, that he can change the world and, thus, behave in the same way as an entrepreneur (in the sense suggested by M Lingren and J Packendorff, 2011). The rules require everyone to be responsible and to refuse to be weighed down by company bureaucracy or politics. But they also demand constant commitment and a high level of performance. Everyone must assess his own contribution before it can leave the “garage”, knowing that, in the end, it is the client and thus the market that will judge the quality of the work.

The entrepreneurial dimension of projects is not at all fortuitous in the revelation of the sufferings of the project actors. Miles et al., (1997) anticipated the development of temporary organizational forms, the cellular form, as a response to turbulent environments and the necessary reorganization of teams according to demand and knowledge requirements. These small project teams would be constantly seeking entrepreneurial opportunities, and set up or dissolved according to these opportunities. This supposes a strong capacity for self-organization and the ability to adapt to the current circumstances (the development of

⁵ In the sequel to this article, we have been looking at visual methods. They are little used in management science and entrepreneurship, but we believe they deserve greater attention.

⁶ It is about plausible reasoning for some, but not for others, which could satisfactorily solve the problem referred to (Le Moigne, 1990)

⁷ Here is a reminder of the 12 rules: (1) Believe you can change the world (2) Work quickly, keep the tools unlocked, work whenever (3) Know when to work alone and when to work together (4) Share tools, ideas. Trust your colleagues (5) No politics. No bureaucracy. (These are ridiculous in a garage.) (6) The customer defines a job well done (7) Radical ideas are not bad ideas (8) Invent different ways of working (9) Make a contribution every day (10) If it doesn’t contribute, it doesn’t leave the garage (11) Believe that together we can do anything (12) Invent!

entrepreneurial behaviour) and is realised by greater participation in the outcome of the project. We recognise here some of the key features of the “garage ethos”.

The myth of enjoyable work as well as the modernity of project work thus encourage the project actor to commit to and accept this logic of obligation and soft domination (Courpasson, 2000). Unlike Marxist domination, this domination is not linked to a denial of autonomy, quite the opposite. The project is seen as a career booster, an opportunity to have a position within the company, which cannot be refused in the “*struggle for position*” (de Gaulejac, 2009). Symbolic violence is a powerful notion for the actor who is experiencing difficulties whilst at the same time benefiting from an opportunity. For the individuals involved, the enterprise is no longer on the outside, but becomes an “interiority”, and the contradictions that require the actor to always do better with less, become the paradoxes which lead to stress and exhaustion or a feeling of harassment (de Gaulejac, *ibid*). Legoff (2006, 70) offers a critical take on Hewlett Packard’s 12 rules “*each employee is charged with being autonomous and at the same time has to comply with strict performance norms. He is asked (and has little other choice) to be “responsible” for his work and the performance of the enterprise in the sacrificial logic of survival and urgency, the effect of which is often an increased workload*”.

These rules reveal the “dark side” of the project (Asquin, Garel, Picq, 2007; de Gaulejac, 2009; Gällstedt, 2003; Sommerville and Langford, 1994; Zannad, 1998). But the intention here is not to stigmatise work as a place of suffering. The subjective relationship that managers have with their work is largely satisfactory and employees, generally, see their work as an opportunity for self-development, even resilience (Bourion and Bournois, 2010). But researchers are only just starting to reflect on the tensions that project work can generate, notably in the paradoxes to which it subjects its actors. Whilst project work is thought to be more interesting because it is projective and reflective, it also places greater pressure on the individual (Askenazy, 2005). Lingren and Packendorff (2006) point out that project work although generally seen as liberating, can also be a “*mental prison*”.

The directors themselves may discourage this enquiry. How could the person who has decided to take on the risks, suffer from something that has not been imposed on him? And even if many entrepreneurs suffer in private, is it politically possible to talk about it? Would it be legitimate for an entrepreneur to talk about his own suffering? The employees have to endure uncertainty, unemployment, and heavy work schedules. The suffering of the director of an SME would not be “audible” according to Torres (2009) and that of the entrepreneur would not be any more audible.

The context of the project should help us to understand the suffering of the entrepreneur. We invite our research community to include this question in the programme of research into the entrepreneurial project. It would be interesting to reflect on the symbolic violence mentioned above. It must be very difficult for a director to accept a low level of revenue after ten years of doing business, when he has created an innovative enterprise that has received public support as a result of a government policy of reindustrialisation.

We are also thinking of the entrepreneur who, at an early age, was encouraged by the entrepreneurial model of his elders. How could he possibly refuse this opportunity? How could he not grasp this opportunity in the “struggle for position”? How could he have any doubts when he himself legitimises the rules to which he is constrained?

We have to reflect also on the advice given to numerous unemployed people to become self-employed. This means that we are asking them to create work for themselves that the system is unable to provide. As Ehrenberg (2000) points out, in many respects, we would be living in a society that generates suffering as a result of the advice given to be the entrepreneur of one's own life.

This question does not just concern the more risky areas of entrepreneurship. Even the creators of new technology companies, who started their project in their forties, say that they fear losing their job (Asquin and Chastand, 2009). They are worried that they have lost a certain amount of technical expertise, as a result of having had to concentrate on the management of the company. They refer to problems linked to the conflict between the role of technical expert and that of professional manager, and they doubt their employability following an entrepreneurial venture.

There seems to be much research to do in this area and we would like to explore the progressive isolation into which the entrepreneur retreats, and his attempt to compensate for his anguish by a hyperactivity that often hides an inability to step back and assess the situation. Like the project actor, he is faced with self-evaluation and thus cut off from "*the framework of human relations*" (Legoff, 2006).

In conclusion, we wish to renew our invitation to the researchers in entrepreneurship to reflect on the "project" perspective in entrepreneurship. This reflection could be developed around the themes set out in this paper: the place of the project as a paradigm in entrepreneurship research; the methodologies that could be used to tackle the entrepreneurial project; the inherent suffering of the entrepreneurial project. We hope that the entrepreneurial project will be developed within the entrepreneurship research community and will lead to new questions in a debate that is only just beginning.

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