

**Missing the Point?
Finding Contextual Detail in Entrepreneurship and Small Firm Scholarship**

ABSTRACT

The trajectory of entrepreneurship scholarship can be characterized by a trend towards functionalist approaches. This has arguably led to findings that trade the contextualization of entrepreneurial processes for abstracted theoretical generalizations. We propose a methodological response that draws on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis to form the theoretical basis of a more nuanced empirical conception of the entrepreneur *in situ*. Our approach addresses current epistemological concerns in entrepreneurship scholarship by prioritizing the practical knowledge and reasoning skills of the entrepreneur. Additionally the proposed methodology provides a solution to an analytical problem confronting scholars who must select from myriad potentially relevant contexts to incorporate into analysis. We conclude our article by identifying some research opportunities that are enabled through adoption of an ethnomethodology/conversation analysis perspective. We hope that scholars may expand upon, complement and challenge current conceptualizations of entrepreneurial behavior through this method.

Keywords: Methodology, entrepreneurship, conversation analysis

“Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.”

Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Samuel Taylor Coleridge

INTRODUCTION

Coleridge’s passage is a fitting analogy for entrepreneurship and small firm (Entre/SME) scholarship in which context is, at once, everywhere, yet nowhere in the analytical spotlight. One factor behind the prevailing ‘soft-focus’ approach to context is philosophical and methodological choice; as Jennings, Perren, and Carter (2005) note, Entre/SME research exists within a functionalist hegemony that relegates alternative analytical paradigms to either peripheral - or worse – deviant roles. The effect of this positivistic trajectory on our understanding of The Entrepreneur is significant. Scholars can, in practice, formulate research problems theoretically without ever entering the field and in doing so risk both the contextual relevance of their findings and the reification of core constructs. Interpretative research, which has gradually achieved some degree of legitimacy in the international field, is notionally better connected to the ‘lived world’. However, ongoing pressures to generalise and decontextualize findings using multiple-case study approaches have arguably led to similar problems of abstraction. More recently, authors have deployed narrative and discursive approaches to understand the *socially constructed* entrepreneur (Chell, 2000; Downing, 2005; Fletcher, 2006). These contributions have respecified conceptualisations of entrepreneurial processes and challenged normative philosophical assumptions within the field (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009). It is argued in this paper however, that the operationalization of research within this stream has, thus far, also failed to fully locate and contextualise the dynamic co-creation of entrepreneurship through *in-situ* interactions of participants in the entrepreneurial process.

This conceptual article will explore treatment of context and practice in the entrepreneurship domain before suggesting a new philosophical and methodological direction for scholars seeking to connect with the situated ‘work’ of the entrepreneur. We begin this article by reviewing recent debates concerning the institutionalisation of logico-positivistic approaches in entrepreneurship research before then considering calls to explore entrepreneurial phenomena from beyond present ontological and epistemological boundaries (Down, 2013; Watson, 2013a). We then turn to the analytical significance of both context and practice, each of which are important features of research work whose relative prominence is, to a large extent, contingent on philosophical and methodological choice. Recent articles by Welter (2011) and others (Fletcher, 2011; Watson, 2013a) have reopened discussions around the significance of context and there is now a welcome move towards ‘theorizing context’ rather than simply contextualizing theory (although both are important considerations for researchers). Finally, a framework drawing on Erving Goffman’s interaction order, Harold Garfinkel’s Ethnomethodology and Harvey Sacks’ Conversation Analysis is presented that undertakes to prioritise the practical knowledge of the entrepreneur and *their* accountability for - and orientation to - contextual factors. This

avoids the “arbitrary invocation of a countless number of extrinsic, potential aspects of context” (Arminen, 2005: XV) that researchers encounter when framing their analysis. The paper concludes by discussing some of the challenges and rewards that may be encountered through the adoption of sociological and linguistic approaches to entrepreneurship scholarship.

PART 1

(RE)CONCEPTUALISING THE SITUATED NATURE OF ENTRPERENEURIAL PROCESSES

An area of investigation that has been conspicuously absent from Entre/SME scholarship concerns the practical ‘doing’ (Anderson, Dodd, & Jack, 2012) – or, the ‘work’ - of being an entrepreneur in a specific context. As scholars, we know surprisingly little about how entrepreneurs accomplish mundane activities through everyday social interactions, or how they navigate routine business problems within locally embedded social, cultural and institutional contexts. Experience shows this is not a problem that is necessarily unique to entrepreneurship; Llewellyn and Hindmarsh (2010) make a similar observation within the field of organisational studies where, “in research papers, what some domain of work practically entails is normally covered in a section *before* the analysis begins” (4). So, to briefly return to the Coleridge analogy that opened this paper, descriptions of practice in entrepreneurship research seem to be everywhere - much like water – yet they remain stubbornly beyond analytical reach. Rarely are scholars seizing the valuable insights open to them by putting practice and context fully under the microscope. This is a notion supported by Moroz and Hindle (2012) in their review of process-based theories of entrepreneurship which reveals that only 9 of 32 models considered are empirically derived. From an analytical perspective this is problematic; the everyday - often mundane - activities people do to get their work done constitute the foundations of social order and institutions (Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks, & Yanow, 2009). Failing to engage with these building blocks from an appropriate philosophical or theoretical perspective increases the chasm between research findings and lived reality, in turn diminishing the likely explanatory and predictive power of emergent theory. In sum, this aloofness from practice may continue to frustrate efforts to understand the *how* of entrepreneurship and could negatively affect the practical utility of entrepreneurship research for both practicing entrepreneurs and policymakers. There is need therefore to study “phenomena that are actually done, as they become evident in the here and now” (Miettinen et al., 2009: 1309), and to adopt methodological resources that will facilitate this new programme of research.

In setting out such an agenda, this paper builds upon a seam of work pioneered by Bengt Johannisson and others (Johannisson, 1988; Johannisson & Nilsson, 1989; Johannisson, Ramírez-Pasillas, & Karlsson, 2002), who similarly elect to do “research close to where things happen” (Steyaert & Landström, 2011: 124). While the prevailing trend in scholarship has been to ‘control out’ the role of context in favour of objectivist theoretical generalisation (Leitch, Hill, & Harrison, 2010), a group of scholars working loosely under the ‘European School’ moniker have constructed some compelling arguments against such normative attitudes. Tony Watson, for instance, (2013a, b) delivers a powerful case for adopting a pragmatist framework that

draws on Max Weber, Charles Peirce and John Dewey. This takes as its starting point the notion that an abstracted theory of the social world is unobtainable:

“A complete understanding of any aspect of the world is impossible; reality is far too complicated for that to be possible. Knowledge about entrepreneurship, or any other aspect of the social world, is therefore to be developed to provide us with knowledge which is *better* than rival pieces of knowledge, or is better than what existed previously” (Watson, 2013a: 21).

This is a liberating insight, and one that provides an intellectual bedrock for those seeking to connect with entrepreneurship ‘in the field’ yet who aspire to go beyond the quasi-positivistic reductionism inherent in the near ubiquitous multiple-case study approaches of Eisenhardt (1989) and Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007).

A similarly important contribution concerns an emergent understanding of ‘entrepreneurship’ (Johannisson, 2011; Steyaert, 2007), where an ontology of ‘becoming’ as opposed to ‘being’ is enacted. Steyaert (2007) delivers a comprehensive analysis of process-based theories of entrepreneurship and identifies what he terms ‘radical’ opportunities to develop pragmatist and practice-based theories. Jack and Anderson (2002) meanwhile draw upon Giddens’s structuration theory with its concern for structure and agency to explain how embedded processes shape entrepreneurial actions. Significantly, this paper trades an individualistic perspective of the entrepreneur for a view emphasising wider contextual and structural forces.

Despite the promise such ‘left-field’ approaches embody, they mostly fall outside the Kuhnian (1962) notion of what constitutes ‘normal science’ within the discipline. This marginalisation has been an ongoing *bête noire* between authors mostly from the European (and particularly Nordic) research traditions, and the gatekeepers of prestigious, principally North American, academic journals. The contention largely centres on a perceived unwillingness on the part of these editors to publish qualitative, contextually detailed studies that adopt non-traditional ontological and epistemological positions. This, Bygrave claims (2007), has institutionalised now-pervasive functionalist approaches and has expunged some of the messy – though necessary – complexity from entrepreneurship scholarship. While Davidsson (2013) attempts to counter these claims of bias by drawing on his considerable personal experience as an editor working across both traditions, statistical evidence (Bygrave, 2007) suggests that entrepreneurship scholarship is firmly rooted in functionalist approaches that prohibit a more ‘nuanced’ understanding of entrepreneurship (Gartner, 2010).

Making the Case for a Contextualized Approach

Before progressing further it is worth considering for a moment why context is important, and for that matter why it should be given a more prominent role in entrepreneurship scholarship. The most obvious response is that conventional sociology, in the mode of Durkheim, considers that context enables and constrains social actions. Therefore, without cognizance of the extrinsic social ‘facts’ that exist independent of the individual, entrepreneurial behaviour cannot be fully accounted for. While psychology – from which the field of entrepreneurship draws liberally – is

considered to be the science of the individual, sociology is the science of society and arguably therefore requires an increased sensitivity to micro and macro-contextual factors. Holmquist (2003) identifies a scholarly fixation with the entrepreneurial individual, warning that, “aspects of entrepreneurial action have to be analysed in their specific context to grasp the full meaning of the studied phenomenon” (84). This preoccupation has in turn contributed to “frustrated efforts to overgeneralize results across very heterogeneous settings within and across studies” (Wiklund, Davidsson, Audretsch, & Karlsson, 2011: 4).

Scholars are increasingly recognising that sections of entrepreneurship research have failed to adequately account for context in a theoretical and empirical manner (Morrison, 2006; Ucbasaran, Westhead, & Wright, 2001; Welter, 2011; Zahra, 2007). Zahra (2007) identifies ongoing tensions between the theorization and contextualisation of research by explicating difficulties inherent in utilising ‘borrowed’ models that are grounded in assumptions often reflecting other phenomena. Context, defined by Welter (2011: 167) within a management research framework as “circumstances, conditions, situations, or environments that are external to the respective phenomenon and enable or constrain it”, operates concomitantly across a multiplicity of dimensions, yet despite this, entrepreneurship papers tend to focus on only a single aspect of context (Holmquist, 2003; Welter, 2011). Leitch et al. (2010) and Bygrave (2007) blame the tendency of entrepreneurship scholars to ape the reductionist natural sciences for poor contextualisation, while Gartner (2010) argues that quantitative studies, which are proportionally overrepresented in top entrepreneurship journals, “can never portray the interdependent interactive aspects of individuals over time, engaging with, and responding to, their circumstances”(10).

The call from many scholars who seek to rebalance entrepreneurship scholarship on a more contextualised and anti-positivistic keel, has been to explore interpretivist epistemologies. These too however present some methodological problems for the development of the research field. Take for instance ethnography and associated approaches such as autoethnography (Fletcher, 2011), action research and participant observation (Mueller, Volery, & von Siemens, 2012). This loose family of methods is grounded in painstaking fieldwork and provides richly descriptive insider accounts of often poorly understood phenomena (e.g., Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004). From a context perspective though, these approaches are problematic; the researcher has an infinitesimal number of contexts at can be selected to frame their research findings and therefore, as a consequence, the knowledgability of the researcher, which is mostly derived from reconstructed post-hoc field notes, is prioritised over the data subject.

Consider the following passage of illustrative ‘contextual’ information provided by Welter (2011: 166):

“In rural post Soviet Uzbekistan young women and girls are supposed to stay home until they are married. Therefore, the young woman learned a traditional craft because this was one of the few vocational training opportunities available to her; and this activity could be conducted from home.”

Several potentially important contextual factors are identified in this short passage. We know that this research is based in (1) rural (2) post Soviet Uzbekistan in a

possibly paternalistic society where (3) women and girls are supposed to stay at home until they are married. Furthermore, an unsophisticated economy is alluded to as the girl learned a (4) traditional craft as there are (5) few vocational training opportunities available. Finally, religious constrictions are perhaps implied by the significance of the work activity being (6) conducted from home. While all of these factors (gender, race, age, religion and social status) are hypothetically relevant for explaining the enacted phenomenon of female entrepreneurship in this particular time and place, they nevertheless represent analytical layers that *the researcher* has deemed important (perhaps through *a priori* theorizing or even personal or experiential preference). So, while the ethnographic approach will certainly provide invaluable description of a phenomenon within a bounded context, it does not necessarily present satisfactory evidence that these were the relevant contextual forces that enabled or constrained the data subjects' behaviour.

Part II

TOWARDS THE STUDY OF SITUATED INTERACTION IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP SCHOLARSHIP

Following preceding discussions on context and practice in entrepreneurship scholarship, the second part of this paper will present an analytical basis¹ for studying everyday scenes of entrepreneurship in locally embedded contexts.

Interaction Order, Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis

Conversation Analysis (CA), developed by Harvey Sacks in the 1960's, is the systematic analysis of talk-in-interaction. The purpose of such analysis is to uncover the intersubjective meaning of social actions by subjecting recordings of naturally occurring interaction to exhaustive scrutiny. Sacks (Sacks & Jefferson, 1995; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) constructed his framework on the foundational efforts of Erving Goffman (1955, 1961) whose own pioneering interest in face to face 'interaction order', inspired Harold Garfinkel's (1967; 1974) ethnomethodological approach. Ethnomethodology is the study of participants' methods for achieving endogenous social order in a given context. It remains a somewhat radical social theory owing to a rejection of 'macro' explanations for social action:

"Garfinkel argues, the methods essential to work (and organization) will be found in details of attention and mutually oriented methods of work, and ordered properties of mutual action, rather than abstract formulations" (Rawls, 2008: 702)

This emphasis on the 'detail' of social action forms the basis of ethnomethodologically informed studies' unique contribution to social science. Garfinkel himself offers strong criticism (1948/2006, 1952/2008) of sociological approaches that he believes obscure what individuals *actually do*, insisting instead that order can be obtained from even the most mundane examples of interaction. This in turn forms the basis for conversation analysis and Harvey Sack's famous mantra of 'order at all points'. Conversation analysis, or *ethnomethodological interaction*

¹ Regrettably, owing to space constraints, a full articulation of the method cannot be provided in this article, however several excellent volumes (eg. Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008 and Wooffitt 2005) provide a more comprehensive introduction.

analysis as some believe it should be more accurately titled (Psathas, 1995), is a rigorous set of principles and procedures for studying the social world as it happens.

The primary unit of analysis in CA is the sequential organization of conversation turns. So, for instance, each utterance or gesture by an individual performs a social action that is reflexively tied to the previous utterance. Hence, participants in an interaction make visible their understanding of the previous 'turn' through the design of their immediate response and simultaneously demonstrate their relationship to society through each turn. This framework allows the analyst (a term used in CA to refer to the researcher) to ascertain precisely *how* intersubjective meaning is achieved on a second by second basis with respect to enabling and constraining structural factors. Situated interaction can then be reverse-engineered to understand the "composition, meaning and hidden rationality" of participants' social actions in order to understand a phenomenon (Arminen, 2005: XIII).

While initial CA studies focus on the non-institutional dimensions of conversation, latter studies became interested in the unique ways in which situated interaction shapes and is shaped by contextual (i.e. institutional) forces. In particular, many studies have focussed on institutional settings such as courtrooms (Atkinson & Drew, 1979) and medical consultations (Maynard & Heritage, 2005) where "interacting parties orient to the goal-rational, institutionalized nature of their action" (Arminen, 2005: XIV). Through comparison with 'normal' conversation, the unique and relevant properties of institutional conduct can be brought to the analytical foreground:

"The analyst demonstrates the ways in which the context plays a role in a particular aspect or a segment of interaction, thus allowing us to examine the role the institution has in and for the interaction in the setting" (Arminen, 2005: XIV)

The institutionality of a particular interaction can be revealed through participants' orientation to the 'procedural relevance' of utterances and actions (Schegloff, 1991). This can be demonstrated through features such as lexical choice, the overall structure of interaction, and the asymmetrical distribution of questioning entitlements amongst participants. In order to perform an institutional task such as 'completing a job interview', both interactants will orient to the question-answer structure that typically characterises a recruitment interview (and the power imbalance entailed in such circumstances). Each participant will also restrict the vocabulary employed in his or her utterances and the interviewer will most likely attempt to cultivate a display of professional neutrality through each conversation turn.

Abandoning the Bucket Approach to Context

Central to an ethnomethodological/conversation analysis mentality is a rejection of what Garfinkel (1967) terms the 'bucket approach' to context whereby actors are treated as 'cultural dopes'. This refers to "man-in-the-sociologist's-society who produces the stable features of the society by acting in compliance with preestablished and legitimate alternatives of action that the common culture provides" (1967, p. 68). The implication of this position is that the entrepreneur, or any other social actor for that matter, is treated as a passive puppet of "abstract social forces which impose themselves on participants" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008: 139). Conversation analysis takes a contrasting perspective, holding that individuals are actively knowledgeable of

their environment, making visible (to others, and hence analysts) their orientation “to the relevance of contexts”(ibid). Each utterance or gesture made in response to a prior interlocutor’s utterance provides evidence of how intersubjective understanding of a task or activity is maintained. Analyst’s must therefore ‘bracket’ understanding of context in order to grasp the endogenous construction of structure through this interaction (Arminen, 2005).

In conversation analysis studies, the burden falls on the analyst to show the ‘procedural relevance’ of context and structure for a particular interaction. It cannot be assumed that power asymmetries, social status or gender are enabling or constraining factors unless the design and flow of interactional sequences suggests so. Prior studies on male interruption of females illustrate this point acutely (James & Clarke, 1993). The follow excerpt from Zimmermann and West (1975: 108) shows how a male (A) projects a dominance over a female (B) by interrupting and finishing a sentence (lines 4 and 5).

- 1 A: How would’ja like to go to a movie later on tonight?
 (3.2) 2 B: Huh?=
 3 A: A movie y’know like (x) a flick?
 (3.4) 4 B: Yeah I uh know what a movie is (.8) It’s just that=
 5 A: You don’t know me well enough?

Rather than treat contextual factors including gender as an “immediate explanatory resource” (Arminen, 2005: 33), conversation analysis demands empirical evidence of *how* gender is accountably relevant during an interaction rather than being a purely exogenous constraint.

Talk as Doubly Contextual

A fundamental departure point for studies of CA is the notion that talk and actions are doubly contextual. In this sense context is considered to include both the “immediately local configuration of preceding activity in which an utterance occurs, and also to the “larger” environment of activity within which that configuration is recognized to occur” (Drew & Heritage, 1992: 18). Firstly, talk is *context shaped* in that it cannot be understood without reference to the preceding utterance. The context will also enable and constrain episodes of talk meaning that participants in an interaction must design their behaviour in a manner appropriate to the local environment. This becomes particularly important during formal and quasi-formal institutional interactions such as courtrooms, classrooms or even news interviews. In the latter example, news journalists must design their talk by taking into consideration obligations of ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ when conducting live interviews on-air (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Greatbatch, 1998). Close analysis of these interactions can provide description of how ‘neutrality’ is achieved (and often circumvented) by reporters.

Second, talk is *context renewing*. As “every current utterance will itself form the immediate context for some next action in a sequence, it will inevitably contribute to the contextual framework in terms of which the next action will be understood (Drew & Heritage, 1992: 18). This means that interactional context is a dynamic and changeable structure that is perpetually being incrementally renewed, maintained and

altered. This provides justification for a rejection of a 'containing view' of structure where 'cultural dopes' are at the mercy of abstract social forces. Instead, it demonstrates that context is endogenously created by knowledgeable actors who make visible their orientation to context. This mind-set signals a possible intersection with Steyaert's Steyaert (2007) conception of 'entrepreneuring' in which entrepreneurial identity is an ongoing project rather than a final product of activity. Similarly, it acknowledges Sarasvathy's (2001, 2003) anti-deterministic theory of effectuation and Weick's (1988, 1995) organisational sensemaking.

Recovering Organisation Through audio/video Recordings of Naturally Occurring Interaction

Utilising real time recordings of naturally occurring interaction is central to the CA approach, yet such data is rarely deployed in entrepreneurship scholarship. The distinctive properties of recorded multimedia address some important concern raised by Gartner (2010: 13) in relation to openness and integrity in the research process:

"I believe that one of the great weaknesses of much of my earlier quantitative scholarship is the failure to provide opportunities for readers to see the data that was used in these studies. By data, I mean, all of the data that was used to construct a dataset that was subsequently analyzed and reported in the journal article. This would include the questionnaires used, the research protocols used, and all of the raw data collected from these questionnaires. The failure to provide readers with opportunities to see all of the data is, I believe, asking the scientific community to trust me in ways that are incredibly naïve."

The conventional approach in scholarship, where data is largely hidden from users, is strictly prohibited within conversation analysis. Part of Sacks' objective was to create an observational science of social life where "the reader has as much information as the author, and can reproduce the analysis" (Sacks & Jefferson, 1995: 27). This is anathema to most qualitative work too, in which readers are expected to take on trust that events are relayed meaningfully:

"The observer and the subject they are observing are each engaged in a different constitutive practice. Because of this they are also quite literally engaged in different social worlds. It follows then that they are constructing different worlds of objects, and consequently have different objects before them" (Rawls, 2008: 725).

Without a permanent reproducible record of events via audio or video, analysis can only ever offer a single *prima facie* account of a phenomenon in a given time and place. This account cannot be empirically reviewed, challenged or reinterpreted by other scholars, hence placing primacy on the initial recollection and interpretation of the author(s). Davidsson and Wiklund (2001) develop this points further in their review of the entrepreneurship field: "Real time studies are valuable as retrospective approaches are likely to be flawed by memory decay, hindsight bias and rationalization after the fact." Yet, since publication of their article, few have taken up the call (an interesting example being Miller & Sardais, 2013 who utilise a diary approach to capture more detailed temporal dynamics of practice). It can only be

speculated that the relative dearth of real time analysis in entrepreneurship scholarship owes to a perceived lack of analytical frameworks that deal with such data, or perhaps even a reticence to deal in findings that are purposively not generalizable.

Part III

A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR AN OBSERVATIONAL SCIENCE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Considerable strides have been taken in pushing entrepreneurship scholarship towards pathways that embrace pluralist epistemologies and ontologies (Anderson & Warren, 2011; Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011; Wiklund et al., 2011). It is argued however that there remain many theoretical resources from the disciplines of sociology and linguistics that could be applied to gain a better understanding of “when, how and why entrepreneurship happens” (Welter, 2011: 176). As our article has illustrated, this may require a significant shift in the mental models of both researchers and users of entrepreneurship research. This is rarely a painless endeavour; Silverman (1998: vii) recalls a noted academic from LSE “noisily walking out in disgust from the hall during Sack’s talk” at a 1972 conference on ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. It does - at least initially - seem heretical to abandon a container theory of context in which pre-established extrinsic social structures enable and constrain individual behaviour. CA however offers a particularly robust alternative to this position that - uniquely amongst methods - provides concrete empirical explanation as to how individuals accomplish intersubjective order within a given context. While CA research may not offer superficially attractive general theories, it does afford the potential to cut across some of the static that envelops emerging research paradigms such as entrepreneurship, by reconnecting abstract theoretical models with examples of practice.

When Sarasvathy and Venkataraman (2011) ask the fundamental question, ‘what do entrepreneurs do’, they focus their answer, as most scholars do, on categories of activity such as seeking opportunities or creating organisations. From a Conversation Analysis, or even a more general practice-oriented perspective, this does not, in actual fact, explain what entrepreneurs *do*. What does exploiting an opportunity look like in practice rather than as a reified construct? How do entrepreneurs rebalance relational asymmetries during interactions with venture capitalists? How do they accomplish the act of a single networking encounter? Or a selling encounter? Or a business negotiation? Or even a collaborative strategizing activity for that matter? How can it be empirically shown that certain contextual factors are relevant for accomplishing these activities while others are not? These are questions that we propose can be answered through real time analysis of naturally occurring scenes of entrepreneurship using ethnomethodological and conversation analysis methodologies.

It is no stretch to say that entrepreneurship happens through interaction (Chell, 2007). From informal interaction with venture employees, suppliers, customers and competitors through to quasi-formal and even formal interactions with bank managers, venture capitalists, newspapers, conference audiences and business incubators. Where these interactions have been studied, very few have taken seriously the actual ‘work’ involved in creating and sustaining local order. Instead, social actions are read against *a priori* themes and categories that look, and expect to find certain behaviours and actions. Our intention with this article is to offer a departure

point for entrepreneurship scholars seeking to understand the institutional and contextual character of everyday social interaction. Pursuing this objective using the methodological resources of conversation analysis and ethnomethodology will, we hope, help to create a truly observational science of entrepreneurship.

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