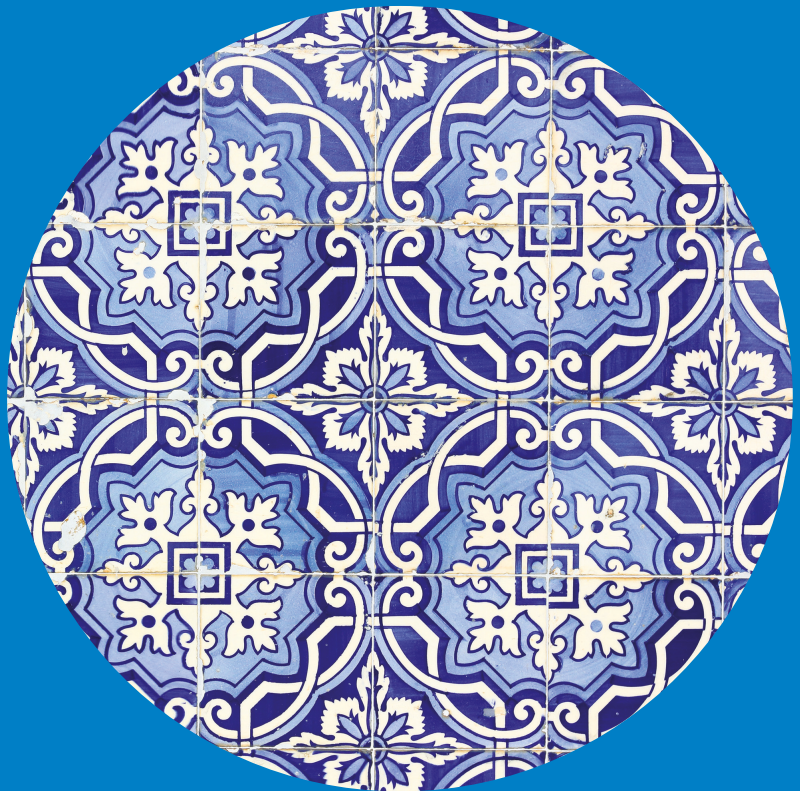


Being different while being similar: Entrepreneurial ventures and the pursuit of legitimacy

Fernando Pinto Santos



Being different while being similar: Entrepreneurial ventures and the pursuit of legitimacy

Fernando Pinto Santos

Main dissertation advisor

Professor Rebecca Piekkari, Aalto University School of Business, Finland

Co-dissertation advisor

Doctor Toni-Matti Karjalainen, Aalto University School of Business, Finland

Preliminary examiners

Professor Raghu Garud, Pennsylvania State University, USA

Doctor Florian Überbacher, University of Zurich, Switzerland

Opponent

Professor Raghu Garud, Pennsylvania State University, USA

Aalto University publication series

DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS 199/2017

© 2017 Fernando Pinto Santos

ISBN 978-952-60-7664-5 (printed)

ISBN 978-952-60-7665-2 (pdf)

ISSN-L 1799-4934

ISSN 1799-4934 (printed)

ISSN 1799-4942 (pdf)

<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-60-7665-2>

Images: pixabay.com (cover); Lovia (essay 3).

Unigrafia Oy

Helsinki 2017

Finland

European Commission; Aalto University School of Business;
Foundation for Economic Education; HSE Foundation.

Author

Fernando Pinto Santos

Name of the doctoral dissertation

Being different while being similar: Entrepreneurial ventures and the pursuit of legitimacy

Publisher School of Business

Unit Department of Management Studies

Series Aalto University publication series DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS 199/2017

Field of research Organization and Management, Entrepreneurship

Date of the defence 27 January 2018

Language English

☐ **Monograph**

☐ **Article dissertation**

☒ **Essay dissertation**

Abstract

Legitimacy is a judgment about an entity's appropriateness and/or desirability within the established beliefs and norms of a social setting. Attaining legitimacy generally enhances organizational survival since audiences are more likely to support firms that are judged as legitimate. Legitimacy is especially relevant for entrepreneurial ventures given that these organizations need to attract resources for growth. Thus entrepreneurs commonly engage in communication activities that seek to influence audiences' judgment of their firms' legitimacy. An important body of scholarly work has addressed how the legitimacy of entrepreneurial ventures is pursued but current understandings on the discursive aspects of this pursuit continue to be limited.

The main purpose of my study has been to develop a rich understanding of how entrepreneurs discursively strive to legitimate their firms. My dissertation is composed of three essays, each one based on the case of an entrepreneurial venture and focusing on a particular facet of discursive legitimation. Essay 1 is based on the study of a new firm in the mobile game industry and addresses the discursive strategies employed by entrepreneurs. In particular, this essay reveals how entrepreneurs seek to legitimate their organization by claiming both conformity to the organization's field and distinctiveness from it. In essay 2, I delve specifically into stories as legitimation strategies. Over time, stories can become misaligned with changed circumstances such as the development of new capabilities, or changes in the competitive environments. While entrepreneurs may revise their ventures' stories to cope with these changes, preserving the continuity of the foundational story that ensured success in the first place is essential to avoid scepticism from audiences. In essay 2, I study this tension between continuity and change. Finally, essay 3 is based on the case of a new venture in the fashion industry. Aiming at gaining the support of investors and business partners, the entrepreneurs employed verbal and visual discursive strategies to strive for legitimacy. In particular, I identified and explored two strategies grounded in the visual mode of communication.

My research adds to the current literature by characterizing the discursive strategies employed by entrepreneurs in the pursuit of their ventures' legitimacy. These strategies are based on both the verbal and the visual modes of communication. Importantly, my study reveals that a tension between distinctiveness and similarity underlies the challenges faced by entrepreneurs when pursuing the legitimacy of their organizations, and sheds light on these challenges.

Keywords entrepreneurship, discourses, discursive strategies, identity, legitimacy, legitimation, materiality, narratives, organizations, stories, visual communication.

ISBN (printed) 978-952-60-7664-5

ISBN (pdf) 978-952-60-7665-2

ISSN-L 1799-4934

ISSN (printed) 1799-4934

ISSN (pdf) 1799-4942

Location of publisher Helsinki

Location of printing Helsinki

Year 2017

Pages 170

urn <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-60-7665-2>

Acknowledgements

My first word of thanks goes to Toni-Matti Karjalainen. I would most certainly never have come to Finland and initiated my doctoral studies at Aalto University if Toni hadn't believed in me in the faraway year of 2012. From Toni I always had a word of motivation and optimism and with him I took my first steps in learning the craft of research. I will always be indebted to him for his unconditional support for and supervision of my work. It is with similar gratitude that I regard Rebecca Piekari's supervision during my doctoral journey. My work greatly benefited from her rigour, as well as from her intellectual brightness. I admire Rebecca's pragmatism, genuine collegial spirit and empathy. Like many others in our community, I look at Rebecca as a role model and I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to learn so much with her.

Eleanor Westney is another scholar to whom I owe much. Our discussions over the years have truly impacted my work. After each of our encounters I always felt renewed energy and confidence to continue pursuing my often fuzzy and underdeveloped ideas. All my essays benefited from her opinions and the introduction part of this dissertation was developed under her guidance. Finally, Davide Ravasi and Eero Vaara were also very important during my doctoral journey. Over time, I greatly benefited from their advice in the development of my essays and I feel really fortunate for having had the opportunity to learn with them. Special thanks also to Davide for having welcomed me at Cass Business School in London. If my work has some quality it is certainly not unrelated to the impact of these five scholars on my research. Their collegiality, kindness and work ethics are qualities that I will always hold as exemplary of what it means to be a scholar.

My doctoral journey has evolved between the international business (IB) unit, the international design business management (IDBM) programme and the organization and management unit. I'm grateful to many people whom I have been lucky to meet and learn with in this interdisciplinary and eclectic environment. Thank you to Kristiina Mäkelä and Tiina Ritvala, former heads of the doctoral programme at IB, as well as Carl Fey, the current head of the programme. A special thanks to Perttu Kähäri, Anton Beletskiy, Lucas Humphries, Piyali Rudra, Max Dike, Tuuli Hakkarainen, Alexei Koveshnikov and Elizabeth Rose for their comments on my research in countless workshops and seminars over the years. Thanks also to Irina Mihailova, Sami Itani, Virpi Outila, Daria Kautto, Hertta Vuorenmaa, Kalliopi Platanou, Anne Quarshie, Rilana Riikinen, Piia Heliste and Iris Saittakari. From day one, IB has been a true community where, regardless of degree of seniority, we all feel like colleagues. The paper development workshops and the seminars in the IB unit, as well as many other more informal gatherings over time, have been of seminal importance to my growth as a scholar.

Before becoming a doctoral student at IB, my first steps at Aalto University were at IDBM. In this interdisciplinary programme, I'm especially thankful to Markku Salimäki, Mikko Koria, Anna-Mari Saari, Oscar Person, Sanna Heiniö and Dirk Snelders. Miikka Lehtonen, in particular, always made IDBM a special place and I'm lucky that we have become friends and shared so many ideas and projects throughout the years. My journey at Aalto was also characterized by my curiosity about the research being developed at the organization and management unit. I benefited much from the seminars at this unit and from its rich and intellectually stimulating environment. From this unit, I had the pleasure of having Henri Schildt and Nina Granqvist acting as examiners in the final seminar where I presented my doctoral research. I greatly benefited from their comments and I'm indebted to them.

I started this doctoral journey in the Marie Curie research network Desma (DESign + MAnagement) and I was incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to work in different projects and participate in doctoral classes all over Europe. Thank you to my dear colleagues in Desma Andrew Whitcomb, Ariana Amacker, Åsa Öberg, Eva Kirchberger, Lien De Cuyper, Marta Morillo, Marzia Arico, Naiara Altuna, Sara Jane Gonzalez, Ulises Navarro Aguiar and Veronica Blugermann. We all shared an incredible journey together. I have been privileged, in particular, to have shared it closely with my good friend Andreas Benker. Our countless discussions on the greater and smaller things of life, occasionally filled with Seinfeld-like characters,

marked an era. Thanks also to those who helped to make Desma such a success: Anna Rylander, Claudio Dell’Era and Oriana Haselwanter.

My visit to Stanford University was another important stage in my doctoral studies. I’m very thankful to the Scandinavian Consortium for Organizational Research and especially to Sarah Soule and Mitchell Stevens for welcoming me so warmly. Thanks also to Annette Eldredge. I’m indebted to Ian Hodder from the Stanford Archaeology Center for the unique experience of participating in his classes about materiality. And I’m also thankful to Larry Leifer for welcoming me to the Center for Design Research. My colleagues at Scancor made my stay a true pleasure in addition to an ever-stimulating intellectual discovery. My stay at Palo Alto was always filled with good moments and my friends Björn and Wajda Wikhamn and Stephan Leixnering made these particularly special.

Very special thanks are also due to the persons in the organizations that I have studied in these last years. In particular, I’m grateful to Lasse Seppänen from Playraven. He has always been incredibly generous and supportive to my research. Thanks to Aman Gupta and Mikko Nikkilä from Veen for their kind availability and patience, over time, in answering all my questions. And thanks also to Anniina Mustalahti, Outi Korpilaakso and Tiina Kosonen from Lovia for their openness and the time they took to share with me their activities and their vision. Thanks also to all the other persons that I met in these organizations while conducting my research. They made my work a continuous discovery and a true pleasure.

I’m indebted also to Raghu Garud and Florian Überbacher, the preliminary examiners of this dissertation. Their constructive comments were extremely valuable and motivating. Their work has been a reference for me and I’m very thankful for having them involved in the evaluation of my research.

I’m very grateful to the participants in the events where I presented my research, over the years. In particular, my work greatly benefited from discussions at three international conferences. In 2016 I presented an early version of my essay 1 at the 6th Organizations, Artifacts and Practices Workshop on Materiality and Institutions in Management and Organization Studies, at Nova School of Business and Economics, in Lisbon, Portugal. I presented my essay 2 at the 77th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management in Atlanta, USA, in 2017. And, finally, in 2016 I discussed my essay 3 at the paper development workshop on multimodal research in organization and management studies at the 32nd EGOS Colloquium in Naples, Italy.

In these last years, I have been lucky to meet, discuss and learn with many other people, on the most diverse occasions. Thank you to Anne Rindell, Mario Burghausen, John Balmer, Ana Pinto de Lima, Inês Peixoto, Paulo Dziobczewski, Valéria Assis and Antero Ferreira for having been part of my journey. Furthermore, at Aalto University School of Business I’m very thankful to Ingmar Björkman and Janne Tiennari who always ensured the best conditions for doctoral students. At an administrative level, Ritva Laaksovirta also did the same throughout these years. Aalto University School of Business has always provided the best supportive environment I could ever ask for.

Nothing that I have done in the last years would have been possible without the financial support of different entities. First of all was the European Commission through the Marie Curie project Desma. Secondly, Aalto University School of Business made it possible to continue my research after Desma. Thirdly, the Foundation for Economic Education (Liikesivistysrahasto) financed my last year of research and enabled me to conclude my doctoral studies. Finally, the Foundation for Economic Education together with the HSE Foundation (Helsingin Kauppakorkeakoulun Tukisäätiö) made possible my visit to Stanford University and I’m very grateful to these organizations.

Finally, I’m thankful beyond words to my wife Paula. She always encourages me to think and to dream big. Our life together has been a continuous adventure and coming to Finland has been one of the most rewarding chapters of this adventure. Paula’s strength and kindness make the most beautiful things possible. Our children, Maria and Tomás, attest to that. Since I met you, and as Florence Welch has put it, “your heart is the only place that I call home”. Thank you.

Helsinki, 16th November 2017
Fernando Pinto Santos

Dedicado à minha mulher, filhos e mãe.

*“O horizonte lá longe
Tudo o que o olho alcançar*

*E o que ninguém escutar
Te invade sem parar
Te transforma sem ninguém notar
Frases, vozes, cores
Ondas, frequências, sinais
O mundo é grande demais*

*Coisas transformam-se em mim
Por todo o mundo é assim*

Isso nunca vai ter fim”

*Chuva no mar
Marisa Monte / Arnaldo Antunes*

Contents

List of essays	7
1. Prologue: what's the story?	11
2. Overall purpose and quality of the study	15
2.1 Purpose of the study.....	15
2.2 Research questions	18
2.3 Quality of the study.....	20
3. Overview of the literature	24
3.1 Legitimacy	24
3.2 Entrepreneurial ventures' legitimation.....	26
3.3 Discursive strategies of legitimation	29
4. Philosophical and methodological foundations.....	31
4.1 Ontological and epistemological perspectives.....	31
4.2 Methodology	32
5. Discussion and conclusion	41
5.1 Theoretical contributions.....	41
5.2 Managerial implications	44
5.3 Limitations of the study.....	47
5.4 Suggestions for future research.....	48
5.5 Concluding thoughts.....	51
6. Summaries of the essays.....	53
6.1 Summary of Essay 1	53
6.2 Summary of Essay 2	55
6.3 Summary of Essay 3	56
7. Epilogue	58
References.....	59
Essay 1.....	67
Essay 2	95
Essay 3	137

List of essays

Essay 1

Santos, Fernando Pinto. *Legitimation of new ventures: embracing conformity and distinctiveness*. Unpublished essay.

Essay 2

Santos, Fernando Pinto. *Changing without changing: the revision of entrepreneurial legitimation stories*. Unpublished essay.

Essay 3

Santos, Fernando Pinto. *The visual legitimation of new ventures*. Unpublished essay.

List of tables

PART I

Table 1. Phenomenon of study, level of analysis and purpose of the study.	16
Table 2. Entrepreneurial legitimization: approaches and theoretical perspectives.	27
Table 3. Overview of empirical material collected.....	37
Table 4. Essay 1 – summary.	53
Table 5. Essay 2 – summary.....	55
Table 6. Essay 3 – summary.	57

PART II

Essay 1

Table 1. Characterization of legitimization discursive strategies.....	71
Table 2. Legitimation strategies pertaining to Playraven’s team.	77
Table 3. Legitimation strategies pertaining to Playraven’s strategy.	78
Table 4. Legitimation strategies pertaining to Playraven’s organizational practices.	80
Table 5. Playraven’s narrative legitimization strategy.	81
Table 6. Discursive strategies, legitimacy claims and time orientations.	85

Essay 2

Table 1. Narrative layers, according to Pentland (1999) and Bal (2009).....	102
Table 2. Veen’s sources of data.	106
Table 3. Veen’s communication pertaining to narrative theme water with low mineral content.	110
Table 4. Veen’s fabula, stories and texts.	113
Table 5. Veen’s stories plots.	118
Table 6. Excerpts of Veen’s communication released in 2015.	121
Table 7. New insights on the revision of entrepreneurial ventures’ legitimization stories.....	129

Essay 3

Table 1. Lovia’s data sources.	142
Table 2. Data supporting the legitimization strategy of credibilization.	148
Table 3. Data supporting the legitimization strategy of individuation.....	152
Table 4. Characterization of the visual strategies of credibilization and individuation.	158

List of figures

PART II

Essay 1

Figure 1. Fragments of discourses circulating in the mobile game field in Finland.	84
---	----

Essay 2

Figure 1. Constraints to story revision.	103
Figure 2. Veen's stories and materializations of texts.	120
Figure 3. Revision of entrepreneurial legitimization stories.	123

Essay 3

Figure 1. Data structure of the legitimization strategy of credibilization.	147
Figure 2. Data structure of the legitimization strategy of individuation.	151

1. Prologue: what's the story?

Helsinki, autumn 2013. Cold and windy day. No surprise here, it's Helsinki, the most northerly of continental European capitals. I'm sitting in the bar of the hotel Radisson Blu with two strangers I have just met. An earlier search via Google on "brands from Finland" turned up the name Veen, which I had never heard before. Veen is an entrepreneurial venture founded in 2006 that sells water from Lapland, essentially to international markets. A few e-mails later, and there I was meeting the General Managers of Veen. This was the very first interview of my doctoral research and the following was my first question:

"How did the idea of the brand first appear?"

Yes, at the time I was very much interested in marketing communication and its relation to organizational identity. The answer from one of Veen's general managers was:

"The idea came about by the two original founders of the brand. So, there are two Finnish guys... one's background was advertising and the other one... was finance. They were very good friends and they basically came up with the idea sitting in the sauna one day. And at the time... they realized that there was no Finnish brand of water in the premium sector and all the brands in the market at the time were only doing plastic. And... and so they come about this talk: listen... why don't create a brand from Finland? And actually at the same time that year... the U.N. has done a world water assessment on the quality of water and Finland was voted to have the best quality of water in the world. So, having read that report and having seen that the market really didn't have any... premium brands they decided: why not to create a brand from Finland that is in glass bottles for the premium end of

the market? Because we have such great water in Finland. And that's how the idea of Veen was originally born."

Without realizing this at the time, this answer and the ones that followed that afternoon were quite influential on my doctoral project. What I was not able to grasp then, and what in fact took me some time to realize, is that pervading the organizational identity articulated by Veen's entrepreneurs there was the pursuit for the legitimacy of their venture. Being interested for a long time in organizational identity issues, I was intrigued by how the entrepreneurs seemed to be so concerned in explaining the existence of their ventures and describing their activities as somehow credible and needed. In their interviews with me, but also with the media and in public presentations, the entrepreneurs were actively engaged in justifying their business activities. Furthermore, the entrepreneurs seemed to be systematically explicating their perspectives with particular discursive mechanisms. While carrying out the interviews, I remember taking notes on how the entrepreneurs argued that their business options were coherent, and that their venture's activities were just natural or simply the right thing to do. This kind of claim, based on rationality, naturalization and morality gradually became more and more intriguing to me as I became engaged with new companies and continued with data collection. Some of the discursive mechanisms identified throughout the time I have been involved in this project were curiously already present in Veen's general manager's first answer, above.

In his answer, we have, first of all, a story format. There is a temporal sequence of events (two friends meet, they launch a brand), with identification of characters, place (a sauna? could this be more Finnish?) and story themes (quality of the water, premium product). This simple story underpins the ideas presented to justify the venture's creation. Secondly, one can also grasp an idea of naturalization: in the account above everything is described as almost effortless, things happened in a spontaneous way. Third, we have rationalization: the United Nations stated that the quality of the water in Finland was high. It was thus argued that it was logical to launch such high-quality water. Implicitly there was even a fourth discursive strategy: moralization. It is claimed that there was no premium water in Finland in glass bottles (more ecological than plastic ones). If Finland has such high-quality water wouldn't it be better to launch a premium glass bottle of high quality water than not to do it? Again, naturalization pervades the claim.

The interview with the Veen managers became the first of a series of interviews spread out throughout the time taken by this project. Veen became the first case study of my doctoral research. I followed Veen's activities for over three years, and in addition to interviews, I gathered extensive material about the venture, such as communication, internal documents and news in the media. Gradually, I also became engaged with two other entrepreneurial ventures in Finland: Lovia, operating in a niche market in the fashion industry; and Playraven, a venture in the mobile game industry. I started to develop qualitative case studies on these two ventures. Having gained access to the founders of the ventures I started visiting the firms, attending events related with these, and interviewing the entrepreneurs and other people working in the organizations. I have followed these 3 cases for different periods of time, but I was engaged with each one of them for over two years. The cases are presented with the real names of the organizations.

In the extended period of fieldwork, my process of research evolved upon a recursive interaction between the empirical world and the scholarly literature: the emerging findings of the case studies directed my attention to specific aspects of the literature that in turn impacted the subsequent data collection activities and analysis. Thus while my initial interest in the fieldwork revolved around marketing communication and organizational identity issues, legitimization emerged as something increasingly intriguing to me and I decided to follow that path, thus changing the initial research focus. Even before having read systematically about entrepreneurial legitimation, I clearly remember identifying and writing "legitimacy" next to interview transcripts and copies of internal documents. It became evident to me that there was a – sometimes implicit and other times quite explicit – pursuit of legitimacy in the texts I was collecting. I realized that for the entrepreneurs, projecting credibility and some sort of justification for their venture's existence and activities was a recurrent theme in the data. I decided to explore this further. I discovered academic articles on entrepreneurial legitimation, and seminal pieces like that of Lounsbury and Glynn (2001), which focused on entrepreneurship, stories and resource acquisition, became highly influential in the ongoing process of research. Consequently, and having gained what Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) call a theoretical sensitivity, I went back to the fieldwork on the empirical cases' sites and continued to explore the legitimization efforts of the ventures.

Interested in finding out more about how entrepreneurs were discursively pursuing legitimacy within the wider identity construction and communication efforts of their ventures, I decided to set as my research goal to explore these issues. Ultimately, this dissertation is the result of these endeavours. Thanks for joining them as a reader of my work.

2. Overall purpose and quality of the study

How organizations attain legitimacy has been a fundamental concern of scholars in the business domain (Deephhouse and Suchman, 2008). Legitimacy can be understood as the judgment that the actions of an entity are appropriate and/or desirable within some social system of norms and beliefs (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Suchman, 1995; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008). Thus legitimacy signifies alignment with field expectations and understandings (Scott, 1995).

Previous studies have shown that entrepreneurs engage in communication activities that seek to convince key resource providers such as investors, business partners and future employees of their new venture's legitimacy (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; O'Connor, 2002; 2004; Martens et al., 2007; Navis and Glynn, 2011). Since new ventures are commonly characterized by a lack of track record and reputational information, as well as by limited resources such as personnel, capital and consumer goodwill, entrepreneurs try to influence audiences' interpretations of their venture's potential in order to obtain their support (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Rindova and Kotha, 2001; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Überbacher, 2014). While legitimacy ultimately results from audiences' judgments, legitimation refers to the purposive efforts made to accomplish it, since actors do have agency to try to influence these judgments (Suchman, 1995; Bitektine, 2011).

2.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of my study is to develop a rich understanding of how entrepreneurs discursively strive to legitimate their entrepreneurial ventures. The research focus is positioned at an organizational level. I will not address, for ex-

ample, how entrepreneurs pursue their own personal legitimacy or how institutional fields are legitimated. Furthermore, and as will be explained ahead, the focus of my research is on legitimation efforts developed by the ventures and not how legitimacy is established or perceived by audiences. The table below (table 1) synthesizes these foundational aspects of my research.

Phenomenon of study	Entrepreneurial ventures' legitimation.
Level of analysis	Organizations.
Purpose of the study	Develop rich understanding of how entrepreneurs discursively strive to legitimate their entrepreneurial ventures.

Table 1. Phenomenon of study, level of analysis and purpose of the study.

My work is positioned in a particular research path that addresses the 'cultural agency' of entrepreneurs and this is the tradition upon which this research builds and to which it contributes. The concept of 'cultural agency' can be traced back to Lounsbury and Glynn's (2001) work on new ventures' legitimation and 'cultural entrepreneurship'. This seminal work offered an alternative to studies based on economic and rationalist approaches. Culture is here envisioned in broad terms as an interpretative framework and a set of tools that can be strategically deployed as actors make sense of the world (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). As Weber and Dacin (2011, p. 3) explain: cultural resources "include widely recognized schematic identities, frames, roles, stories, scripts, justifications, and moralities. The common 'cultural register' of resources at the collective level then serves as a resource that enables different 'cultural repertoires' at the actor level". Thus a cultural agency perspective highlights entrepreneurs' use of cultural resources in the pursuit of their ventures' legitimacy.

Two premises have been foundational to studies on a 'cultural agency' path of inquiry. Firstly, a cultural perspective is rooted in both identity and institutional theories. Ventures' identities have to be distinct but at the same time, as institutionalists remind us, these firms must conform, to some degree, to the wider social context to be regarded as legitimate. Scholars have advanced the concept of "legitimate distinctiveness" to articulate this tension between distinctiveness and conformity (Navis and Glynn, 2011; Voronov et al., 2013).

Secondly, studies on a ‘cultural agency’ tradition are embedded in the discursive communities or fields in which entrepreneurs operate, discourses thus being central in legitimation (Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010).

Early research on ‘cultural agency’ focused mostly on stories as cultural artifacts employed to convince audiences of new ventures’ legitimacy. The terms “story” and “narrative” have somehow been employed interchangeably in previous studies. As my essay 2 shows in detail, I regard narrative in a broader sense than the one of story. For the sake of simplicity, I will give primacy to the term story in this dissertation’s introduction.

In recent years, studies in a ‘cultural agency’ tradition have evolved beyond stories and have been addressing a variety of cultural resources in use such as frames, vocabularies, rhetoric and institutional logics. However, a number of challenges continue to pervade studies that build on a tradition of ‘cultural agency’ and legitimation. Research has shown that entrepreneurs use legitimation discourses to convince audiences to supply different kinds of resources. And although we know why legitimacy is pursued, understanding how this is done in discursive terms is still a challenge. Previous literature has suggested that entrepreneurial legitimation discourses should: (1) articulate legitimacy claims (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Navis and Glynn, 2011); (2) project the identity of the firm (Martens et. al, 2007; Navis and Glynn, 2011); (3) explain the existence of the organization (O’Connor, 2002; 2004); and (4) express expectations that invite audiences to imagine the future (Garud, Schildt and Lant, 2014). In addition to defining the kind of content that should be expressed in legitimation discourses, a few recent studies have started to address how this content can be articulated: metaphors, analogies and arguments have been highlighted as relevant to pursuing legitimacy discursively (Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010; Cornelissen et al. 2010; Etzion and Ferraro, 2010; van Werven et al., 2015).

However, current understandings on the discursive aspects of entrepreneurial legitimation continue to be very limited (Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010; Überbacher, 2014). This lack of a fine-grained view of discourses limits the capacity to push the research on entrepreneurial legitimation forward. Furthermore, and since effective legitimation management is of uttermost importance for entrepreneurial ventures’ access to resources, this theoretical challenge is

also one of especial relevance for practitioners (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Fisher et al., 2017). If we have limited understanding of how to construct legitimization discourses, how can we make legitimization and subsequent resource acquisition more effective?

A more thorough understanding of the micro-discursive aspects of legitimization is thus critical in both theoretical and practical terms. This is the main challenge to be tackled by this study, and each of the essays is focused on a particular facet of it. I will now explain how I have developed the three research questions of my essays.

2.2 Research questions

The tension between conformity and distinctiveness is paramount in a ‘cultural agency’ perspective on legitimization. Ventures must conform to their fields to be regarded as legitimate but must also show some distinctiveness to convince audiences of their strategic difference (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Navis and Glynn, 2011). This tension underlies entrepreneurial legitimization (see the concept of legitimate distinctiveness, e.g. Navis and Glynn, 2011; Voronov et al., 2013) and it thus important to know more about how it is handled in discursive terms. Thus I formulated the following research question:

How do new ventures handle the tension between conformity to, and distinctiveness from, their institutional contexts, when discursively striving for legitimacy?

Essay 1 addresses this question by connecting across the organizational and the institutional levels. The broad scope of the essay allows highlighting the institutional dimension of legitimization. Also, by mobilizing different theoretical resources in the development of essay 1, I was able to identify issues that motivated my further inquiries. These include the discursive strategies employed by entrepreneurs, as well as matters related with temporality and materiality in legitimization activities.

Essay 2 addresses a particular discursive strategy that was identified in essay 1: stories. Previous literature in a ‘cultural agency’ tradition has also often

highlighted stories as central in entrepreneurial legitimation (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Garud, Schildt and Lant, 2014). Recent work theorizes how stories evolve as the entrepreneurial journey unfolds (Garud, Schildt and Lant, 2014). However, the dynamics remains under-explored empirically. Over time, stories can become misaligned with changed circumstances and while entrepreneurs may revise their ventures' stories to cope with these changes, preserving the continuity of the foundational story that ensured success in the first place is essential to avoid scepticism from audiences. This led me to elaborate the following research question:

How do entrepreneurs manage the tension of changing their venture's stories to face changed circumstances, while also preserving continuity?

Essay 2 concentrates on this question and starts by establishing a clear-cut framework for the discursive elements entailed in a story. From this framework, the paper proceeds to the analysis of how these story elements can be revised over time.

Finally, most of the current studies on legitimation address verbal texts, which hinders the understanding of how entrepreneurial legitimacy is pursued with other modes of communication. In particular, discursive strategies of legitimation have been explored in the verbal mode of communication (Meyer et al., 2013). However, especially with the ascendancy of digital documents and online environments, communication is increasingly also visual and this is also the case with legitimation (Meyer et al., 2013; Vaara et al., 2016). Furthermore, there is not only an increase in the use of visual texts but also in elements of novelty in the use of visual language in contemporary communication (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; 2001; Kress, 2010; Meyer et al., 2013). Thus the understanding of how the use of visual texts impacts the legitimation of entrepreneurial ventures is a relevant and timely issue (Meyer et al., 2013; Vaara et al., 2016), which led me to devise the following research question:

How do entrepreneurs use the visual mode of communication to legitimize their new ventures?

In essay 3 I delve into this issue and inductively propose new legitimization strategies not yet identified in current literature. I have called these strategies credibilization and individuation. These strategies complement other discursive strategies based on verbal texts that have been identified in current studies.

One definition is important at this point. Following Carland et al. (1994) I regard entrepreneurial ventures as firms that engage in at least one of the following strategic activities: (1) introduction of new products or services; (2) employment of new methods of production; (3) opening up of new markets; (4) changing the structure of an industry. These features distinguish an entrepreneurial venture from other firms, such as traditional retail stores. Although some of the literature on legitimization specifically addresses new ventures, in my work I will focus both on new ventures and on ventures that have existed for some years. Thus in this dissertation I give primacy to the term entrepreneurial venture.

2.3 Quality of the study

In this section I discuss how I strove to develop quality research, and explain the practices that have been foundational in this endeavour. I regard quality research as a synonymy of work that is relevant and credible in an academic community (Tracy, 2010; Bansal and Corley, 2011). I have decided to position this discussion in this section since I regard the pursuit of quality as foundational for my research project. Thus, it is an issue that underlies not only the methodological aspects of my studies, but also the whole process of research (Welch and Piekkari, 2017).

Prolonged engagement with empirical settings

The prolonged engagement with my empirical settings was particularly foundational for my pursuit of quality. In each of the three cases studied, the fieldwork extended over two years. These extended periods of time enabled me to develop a deep understanding of the cases. In particular, these prolonged periods offered the opportunity to continue collecting empirical material as the analysis and theorization processes evolved over time. My work was truly iterative and I continuously intertwined literature analyses, interpretation of empirical material and the writing up of texts with the collection of new material. Having an

extended period of fieldwork was thus essential to build this close interplay between theorization and empirical engagement, as time unfolded. Furthermore, the good access to the empirical settings allowed me to get back to key informants at different moments in time, and to build on emerging issues, as well as to confirm and develop my interpretations over time.

Variety of sources of empirical material

Accessing a rich set of different sources of empirical material was also critical to developing an in-depth understanding of my empirical cases. The prolonged fieldwork periods allowed me gradually to gain the trust of the entrepreneurs and obtain access to a variety of informants and sources of data like internal documents. With this variety of sources, I was able to capture multiple perspectives and consequently to embrace alternative and competing views.

Transparency

Another relevant aspect of my pursuit for quality was a concern for transparency. In terms of the empirical settings, stating the names of the firms was something that I deemed as important from the outset of my fieldwork. This allows readers to access further information about the empirical cases and to scrutinize my work, even more so because part of the empirical material that I build my theorization on is publicly available. Transparency was also central in terms of the methods employed and I have detailed the empirical material and how I have then developed the analysis of it. Furthermore, transparency is fundamental to disclosing how my theorization from the cases' findings unfolded and consequently to its being credible in terms of how the conclusions are grounded in the empirical world (Bansal and Corley, 2011). Importantly, transparency also enables my work to be criticized and challenged, as well as expanded in new research in the future.

Thoroughness in handling empirical material

Another key aspect of my pursuit for quality, related to the ability to be transparent about my work, was the procedures of being careful, organized and detailed in handling the empirical material. I have always documented the empirical material after having collected it and I took detailed notes to maintain its organization in an archive. These procedures were intended to avoid mistakes and also to make my process of research as efficient as possible. I also kept all the files that I have worked on over the years which allows me to have a record

of how my work evolved in its multiple dimensions. Also, having the totality of the empirical material in a digital format further strengthened the organization of this material and the ability to access it and work with it over time (Patton, 2015). This thoroughness in my work is probably the greatest value of my concern with transparency.

Writing notes and drafts of texts in a regular fashion

With the general purpose of facilitating my engagement with the cases and increasing my ability to theorize from them I have written numerous texts over time. These texts have ranged in size and format from for example ideas in bullet point lists, summaries and tables with findings, to more developed sections of papers that kept evolving, literally, over the years. These different texts enabled me to share my work with other scholars. Importantly, it was based on this plethora of different texts that I was gradually able to refine my ideas and their presentation, and ultimately develop the essays presented in this dissertation.

Involvement of other scholars

Many of the texts that I have just mentioned were shared with other scholars over time. I discussed them in many paper development sessions at Aalto University, particularly at the International Business Unit, but also at other institutions and events such as conferences. I also regularly shared these drafts with my advisors and with many other colleagues. This involvement of other scholars allowed me to be exposed to different opinions that helped me challenge and refine my own perspectives. In particular, these interactions enabled me to expand my range of theoretical perspectives and the ability to theorize from the cases. Finally, involving other scholars in my work brought new perspectives and ideas to my work.

Scepticism and self-criticism

Finally, assuming a posture of continuously questioning my research was particularly important to assure the quality of my endeavours. In their recent discussion on qualitative research, Welch and Piekkari (2017) offered the metaphor of a researcher as a “sceptic” to illustrate the posture of a scholar who is continuously open to self-criticism and who embraces the provisional and fallible nature of knowledge creation. This view resonates with the posture that I developed during my studies, I suppose mostly out of intuition. Being open-minded and always reflecting on and challenging my own work was something

that underlay my research journey. Ultimately the goal with this posture was to develop plausible work that is trustworthy and that I can confidently stand for.

To conclude this section, I believe it is important to emphasize that my pursuit of quality has been motivated by the guidance of my advisors and stimulated in the doctoral classes I attended. Importantly, this pursuit has also been motivated during the years by countless interactions with many scholars in the academic community at Aalto University. Thus writing this section made even clearer to me the fact that the quality of my work, as well as the efforts made to pursue it, are ultimately very much related to the quality of the academic community of which I have been a part.

The remainder of this introduction to my dissertation is structured as follows: in the next section I present an overview of the literature. The ensuing section describes the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of this study. The theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and avenues for future research then follow. Finally, this introductory part of the dissertation ends with summaries of the essays and a brief epilogue.

3. Overview of the literature

In this section I present an overview of key aspects of the literature that underlie this doctoral project. I start by introducing the concept of legitimacy in the management domain, and address key aspects related to it. I then move to the analysis of the different traditions on the study of legitimacy in the entrepreneurship domain. After positioning my own approach in existing studies, I explain what characterizes the line of inquiry I am pursuing. Finally, I conclude this section with a presentation of the literature on discursive strategies of legitimation.

3.1 Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a social judgment about an entity's appropriateness and/or desirability within the established expectations, values, beliefs and norms of a social setting (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990; Scott, 1995; Suchman, 1995; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002). In the management domain, previous research on organizational legitimacy has evolved within different theoretical traditions that include social movements, ecological, institutionalist and strategic management perspectives. I will now briefly address the latter two, since these are central in my research project.

Institutional theory stresses the fact that many organizational dynamics are influenced by the environment (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1977). In particular, new institutionalists emphasize that socially shared assumptions and normative expectations about what are proper organizational structures and actions often influence organizational practices (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Legitimacy lies at the core of an institutional perspective: organizations seek legitimacy and support by adopting procedures that are consonant with institutions, i.e. widely ac-

cepted norms, beliefs and myths (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). An institutional perspective on legitimacy thus highlights the ways in which field dynamics exert pressures on organizations (Suchman, 1995).

A strategic management view of legitimacy adopts a managerial perspective and addresses the ways in which organizations instrumentally strive for legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). Works in this tradition regard legitimacy as an operational resource that can be managed in the pursuit of organizations' goals (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008). Since legitimacy is ultimately a judgment, legitimation is the term employed in a strategic perspective tradition. This term thus refers to the processes aimed at influencing the social construction of legitimacy (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Bitektine, 2011). Legitimation can be understood as a process of explaining why the organization does what it does (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) or of justification of the organization's role in the social system and its right to exist (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990). In addition, the act of legitimizing or justifying is related to particular goals pursued by the organization (Van Leeuwen, 2007; Reyes, 2011).

To a large extent, the distinction between strategic and institutional approaches is a matter of perspective, with strategic scholars taking the perspective from the organization into the wider environment, whereas institutional theorists adopt the viewpoint of society and from there look at organizational dynamics (Suchman, 1995). Importantly, both traditions share a view of why legitimacy is critical to organizations: legitimacy enhances organizational survival since audiences are more likely to support firms that are judged as legitimate (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990; Suchman, 1995; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008). Finally, many studies in these two traditions have treated legitimacy as a dichotomous concept: either an organization is legitimate or it is not (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Fisher et al., 2016).

Internal and external audiences of organizations are those who ultimately assess legitimacy. These audiences are both individual actors and collective ones. These latter include other organizations and field-level actors, like the media or regulators (Bitektine and Haack, 2015). Although ontologically it is individual actors who analyze and make judgments, it is often collective actors, such as associations and interest groups that form some sort of collective judgment of legitimacy (Bitektine and Haack, 2015). Attention to the differences

among audiences is important because different groups tend to have distinct interests and to use diverse criteria in assessing legitimacy (Ruef and Scott, 1998).

Two different types of audiences' judgments on legitimacy have been identified: cognitive legitimacy and evaluative legitimacy (Überbacher, 2014). Although there are other possible categorizations on these judgments (see e.g. Suchman, 1995) a view of legitimacy as cognitive and evaluative offers a valuable framework that synthesizes the main traditions engrained in the literature. Cognitive legitimacy refers to assessments made based on comprehensibility and plausibility within their social context (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Golant and Sillince, 2007; Überbacher, 2014). On other hand, evaluative legitimacy refers to the process by which audiences judge organizations as desirable or right, within given norms and laws (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Golant and Sillince, 2007; Überbacher, 2014). While this theoretical division has been engrained in the literature, these two facets of legitimacy can be seen as fundamentally interrelated and complementary (Baum and Powell, 1995).

3.2 Entrepreneurial ventures' legitimation

The study of legitimacy has become paramount in the field of entrepreneurship. Research on new ventures has highlighted the fact that these firms usually lack reputation and are characterized by limited past economic performance and by limited resources such as personnel, capital and consumer goodwill (Rindova and Kotha, 2001; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Überbacher, 2014). New ventures are thus constrained by their 'liability of newness' (Singh et al., 1986; Stinchcombe, 1965). To overcome this liability, new ventures need to convince different audiences, such as investors, employees, government agencies and partner organizations of their plausibility and potential (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Navis and Glynn, 2011; Fisher et al., 2017).

The assessment of ventures' legitimacy, in particular, has been emphasized in previous studies as critical for attaining the support of audiences and consequently gaining access to resources (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; van Werven et al., 2015; Fisher et

al., 2016). Hence, legitimacy is seen as essential for new ventures' creation and growth. Moreover, as recognized in recent studies, legitimacy is also critical beyond the initial stages of ventures' activities (Garud, Schildt and Lant, 2014; Fisher et al., 2016). Ventures need to continue having access to resources as their activities expand and legitimacy is key in this regard.

The literature on legitimacy and entrepreneurship can be regarded within two broad approaches. An audience-based approach includes an institutional perspective that generally addresses how institutions influence the legitimacy judgments of audiences, and an ecological perspective that focuses on how legitimacy is affected by structural context (Überbacher, 2014). On the other hand, an actor-based approach essentially takes a strategic management perspective on legitimation and addresses how actors try to influence legitimacy assessments (Überbacher, 2014). Different traditions underpin studies with this strategic management perspective, and include (1) social movements; (2) impression management and symbolic activities and (3) cultural agency. The table below (table 2) positions these perspectives according to the two approaches identified.

Studies' approach	Theoretical perspective	Exemplary studies
Audience-centred	Institutions	Karlsson and Honig (2009)
	Ecological	McKendrick and Carroll (2001)
Actor-centred	Social movement	Weber et al. (2008)
	Impression management and symbolic actions	Zott and Huy (2007)
	Cultural agency	Lounsbury and Glynn (2001)

Table 2. Entrepreneurial legitimation: approaches and theoretical perspectives.

A social movement perspective addresses the ways in which social mobilization contributes to the legitimation of new ventures (Überbacher, 2014). In contrast to this focus on collective action, studies building on impression management and symbolic activities, as well as on a cultural agency tradition, fundamentally take the individual organization as the unit of analysis. In turn, what sets these two research traditions apart is the kind of legitimacy evaluation intended

(Überbacher, 2014). As explained in the last section, previous research has built on two main (although complementary) types of legitimacy assessments: evaluative and cognitive. The research tradition on impression management and symbolic activities has essentially focused on evaluative legitimacy. Thus studies on this tradition have focused on how entrepreneurs communicate the desirability and attractiveness of their ventures in order to influence legitimacy assessments. In a different way, studies on a ‘cultural agency’ tradition have addressed legitimacy aimed at a cognitive kind of evaluation (Überbacher, 2014). Hence, these studies have generally focused on communication that makes the ventures’ existence and activities comprehensible to their audiences.

As stated earlier, studies within a ‘cultural agency’ tradition are based on a strategic management view of legitimacy. These studies address how cultural resources, such as identities and stories, are employed in entrepreneurial legitimization discourses to make the venture comprehensible. Importantly, previous research has posited some key features of these discourses. First of all, legitimization discourses must articulate conformity: firms need to show that they are following institutionalized expectations (Navis and Glynn, 2011). Discourses must then show alignment with cultural understandings and beliefs about what is normative and appropriate (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001).

Secondly, the content of legitimization discourses must also emphasize the ventures’ strategic distinctiveness and competitive advantage (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Voronov et al., 2013). This distinctiveness is usually embedded in the ventures’ organizational identity: the constellation of entrepreneurial claims revolving around issues of “who we are” and “what we do” as a venture (Navis and Glynn, 2011). These two features – conformity and distinctiveness – are thus paradoxical: while ventures need to be aligned with expectations and beliefs, they also need to be distinctive from each other in order to be regarded as plausible (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Navis and Glynn, 2011). The concept of “legitimate distinctiveness” articulates this tension (Navis and Glynn, 2011; Voronov et al., 2013).

Thirdly, entrepreneurial discourses must present an explanation about why a particular venture exists (O’Connor, 2002; 2004; Van Leeuwen, 2007). This explanation positions the venture in the wider institutional field and makes its activities comprehensible (Garud, Gehman and Giuliani, 2014). Fourthly and

finally, discourses must set expectations about the future in order to convince audiences of the new venture's potential (O'Connor, 2002; Martens et al., 2007; Garud, Schildt and Lant, 2014).

These four aspects of discourses' content are highlighted in previous studies as elements commonly employed in legitimation. However, some of these aspects may be privileged in the communication practice of ventures, while others may be downplayed. Entrepreneurs might feel the need to emphasize a view of the future, when for example the venture is commercializing new technology that has not yet proved its applicability or profitability (Garud, Schildt and Lant, 2014). Also, the different life cycles of institutional fields will compel entrepreneurs to highlight, for example, distinctiveness and conformity in different ways (Fisher et al., 2016). In mature fields, the claims of distinctiveness will certainly be more predominant than in fields that are emerging and where some explicit degree of conformity is needed in order to convince audiences of the plausibility of the new venture (Navis and Glynn, 2011).

Although we have an understanding of what legitimation discourses should entail, we do not know much about how these discourses can be constructed. Nonetheless, a few studies have started to address this limitation. Cornelissen and colleagues (Cornelissen et al., 2010; Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010) have suggested that analogies and metaphors are important elements in the reasoning employed to facilitate the comprehension and justification of a new venture. Furthermore, and building on argumentation theory, van Werven et al. (2016) have conceptualized six kinds of argument that are available to be used by entrepreneurs in their discursive legitimation efforts: arguments by generalization, analogy, classification, cause, sign and authority. Anyway, more works are naturally needed to unearth how legitimation discourses can be crafted. In particular, empirical studies are in short supply and the wealth of knowledge these can offer is fundamental to advancing our current understandings on legitimation (Suchman, 2005; Überbacher, 2014; Fisher et al., 2017).

3.3 Discursive strategies of legitimation

Discourses are collections of texts that bring ideas into being and that include, for example, written documents, speeches, interviews, images and symbols

(Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Phillips and Oswald, 2012). Particular discursive constructions, or strategies, have been found to be especially engaging or appealing to influence legitimacy assessments (Vaara and Monin, 2010). These discourses provide justifications aimed at legitimizing particular ideas. The linguist van Leeuwen and colleagues (Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999; Van Leeuwen, 2007) have originally identified and elaborated on four general discursive categories of legitimation: (1) authorization; (2) moralization; (3) rationalization; (4) narrativization. These discursive strategies are often intertwined and overlapping (Vaara et al., 2006).

‘Authorization’ refers to legitimation by the authority of tradition, custom, law or even a person who is vested by some kind of institutional authority, such as an expert. ‘Moral evaluation’ (or moralization) relates to value systems. Adjectives like ‘good’ and ‘healthy’ are frequently used to hint at moral values. ‘Rationalization’ frequently goes hand-in-hand with moralization but assumes a specific role based on the ideas of utility and logical argument. Finally, ‘mythopoesis’ (or narrativization) is legitimation conveyed by stories (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Vaara and Monin (2010) have transposed and expanded this framework into organizational studies, and identified ‘exemplification’ (using specific examples to establish legitimation) and ‘naturalization’ (rendering something as natural by specific discursive means) as new discursive strategies (Vaara and Monin, 2010).

4. Philosophical and methodological foundations

4.1 Ontological and epistemological perspectives

My research is necessarily bounded by my worldview and philosophical perspectives, and so it is important to be clear about these. In terms of ontology, i.e. in terms of my assumptions about the existence and definitions of reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), I follow a critical realist line of thought. Critical realists recognize that the world exists beyond our conscious knowledge or theories about it (Bhaskar, 1997; 1998). In particular, critical realists assume that there is a physical reality that is independent of our social constructions. This does not imply that social constructions are not fundamental to the understanding of the social world, but rather that there is a material reality that should not be disregarded.

With a critical realist perspective, organizations are seen as social, discursive and also as material accomplishments (Carlile et al., 2013; Jones and Massa, 2013). Furthermore, material artifacts do possess qualities and affordances that cannot be simply reduced to the social realm (Leonardi and Barley, 2010; Hodder, 2012; Leonardi, 2012). The material characteristics of media, for example, impact how texts are expressed, circulate and hold potential to be interpreted (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Leonardi, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004). Digital media, in particular, possess material qualities that are different from paper-based media and this naturally impacts discourses' production and consumption (Leonardi, 2012; Hodder, 2012).

Critical realists' ontology is usually regarded within a particular epistemological view with which I'm also empathetic: our comprehension of reality is theory-laden and subjective (Bhaskar, 1997; 1998). As researchers, we have pre-understandings and theoretical sensitivity, and are thus not neutral observers of the empirical world (Hatch, 2012). Furthermore, social phenomena are intrinsi-

cally meaningful, and so there is always an interpretative layer in social science research (Sayer, 2000). Thus there can be different valid perspectives on the phenomenon of study (Bhaskar, 1998; Maxwell, 2012). Embracing these conditions and being self-reflexive and critical is thus fundamental in a process of research (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; 2011).

4.2 Methodology

Opting for a qualitative approach

My case studies of three Finnish entrepreneurial ventures offered me the opportunity to understand legitimation in its context comprehensively, and this was the main reason for the choice of this methodological approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Also, I always valued the open-ended nature in which one can regard qualitative case studies' development. There is flexibility to be surprised by the empirical material in ways that could hardly be anticipated before engaging in the fieldwork, and then follow the emergent and most promising paths of inquiry without downplaying previous knowledge, creativity and intuition (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2010; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007, 2011). In particular, single case studies are especially well suited to pursuing in-depth insights on a phenomenon (Welch and Piekkari, 2017).

As described in the first section of this dissertation's introduction, this flexibility to pursue what emerged as more intriguing and relevant was a key aspect of my research process (van Maanen et al., 2007; Dubois and Gadde, 2014). Additionally, I feel comfortable with qualitative methods of collection and an interpretative analysis of empirical material, something that fits well into a tradition of case study research in the management field (Piekkari and Welch, 2011).

Until now, many of the studies on entrepreneurial legitimation and, more broadly on legitimation in the management domain, continue to be conceptual and although this kind of study has laid important foundations for this path of inquiry, more empirical works are needed (Deephhouse and Suchman, 2008; Überbacher, 2014). In particular, case studies enable a qualitative and longitudinal approach, as well as the use of interpretative methods, which are especially suited to research on legitimacy (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002).

Process of research and empirical cases

The selection of the firms addressed in my research followed a logic of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015). Through my personal networks but also by analysing news in the media and doing searches online, I came across different cases that I considered as potentially interesting as empirical sites. Serendipity was part of the process and I considered different cases as time passed as potentially suited to developing the case studies I aimed to do. By further analysing information about the ventures and later establishing the first contacts in order to ascertain the possibility of access to the firms, I progressively narrowed down the list of potential cases. Along the way, the selection evolved based on my considerations about appropriateness, theoretical relevance according to the goals of the research and access to good information (Patton, 2015; Stake, 2005; Simons, 2009).

The revelatory potential of the cases was also a key aspect of their selection: the cases were expected to offer valuable empirical opportunities to delve into new insights on entrepreneurial legitimization. This assessment was not easy to make at the outset of my research project and while my knowledge about the cases was still being developed, and so intuition on the potential of the cases was also an aspect that was part of the process. Naturally, over time and as my engagement with a first set of cases evolved, I gained the ability to judge the potential relevance of the cases to a study on legitimization in a more informed way. Importantly, and as described at the beginning of this dissertation, legitimization was not my initial research interest. Hence the case selection process was quite intertwined with my engagement with the first empirical cases. In an initial stage, that may be called exploratory, I was still asserting the criteria for case selection and so this process of selection evolved, as the research purposes and questions became gradually more refined over time. Also, this implied leaving behind some of the cases that I initially considered for selection. Ultimately, three cases were chosen and each essay is based on one of them. The cases were considered as especially well suited to delving into particular issues within my broader interest in legitimization.

Essay 1 builds on the study of Playraven, a new venture in the game industry. I became engaged with the case soon after the foundation of the firm and I was thus able to follow closely how the pursuit of legitimacy started being developed in discursive terms. In particular, the case offered a relevant setting to

address the tension between conformity and distinctiveness in legitimation. Along with this research focus, I also became interested in how the legitimation communication of the venture became widespread.

Essay 2 is based on the case of Veen, a firm that was founded in 2006 with the purpose of commercializing water from Lapland. The case offered a rich setting to study how stories are employed in legitimation. In particular, the setting was especially interesting to research on how legitimation stories can be revised over time, as circumstances change. Veen was the first case I became engaged with and as I describe in the beginning of this dissertation, it was a setting that motivated me to focus on the study of legitimation at a time when this focus was not yet defined.

Finally, the case of Lovia (in essay 3) was the last one to be selected and offered the opportunity to study how legitimation is expressed with different communication modes. In particular I decided to focus my study on how the visual mode is employed in legitimation. I was able to engage in the fieldwork while the firm was in a formative phase and so I followed their communication from the start of their activities.

In overall terms, as the collection of empirical material evolved, analysis and interpretation of this material were undertaken at different points in time (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). These moments of data analysis enabled me to engage with the empirical material collected by that date, and also helped to make decisions on how to proceed with subsequent fieldwork. Thus my research evolved over time based upon an iterative logic: there was a continuous and recursive movement between the empirical world of the cases and theoretical perspectives (Dubois and Gadde, 2014; van Maanen et al., 2007; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009).

Sources of empirical material

A variety of qualitative sources of empirical material were used in the three case studies I developed (Piekkari et al., 2009). In this section I briefly characterize the main sources of material that are common across the cases. After this, I detail the empirical material collected in each of the case studies.

Interviews

Throughout the fieldwork I developed repeated interviews with the entrepreneurs. Having the opportunity to meet them at different times allowed me to explore some themes in depth and also to delve further into issues that emerged as relevant throughout the time of my research. During these repeated interactions, trust was built and I managed progressively to get access to other sources of data, such as different internal documents. I was also able to get to know about future activities that I then followed, such as public presentations of the entrepreneurs and events organized by the ventures. In addition to the entrepreneurs, I interviewed other persons working on the ventures. The interviews were semi-structured, with questions defined beforehand in an interview guide. However, there was always openness to explore issues further that were not included in the initial questions formulated. Most interviews took place at the ventures' facilities and all of them were recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

Informal talks were also developed throughout the fieldwork. These were unstructured and resulted mostly from opportunities to talk with the entrepreneurs and employees of the firms when visiting the organizational facilities or when attending public and private events related to the ventures. Hand-written notes were made after these informal interactions. The main purpose of the interviews and informal talks was to gain a deep understanding of the ventures and their activities, as well as their evolution through time. Naturally, legitimization activities and how the interviewees regarded these were an ever-present aim in all my interactions. Finally, grasping the personal motivations and ideas of the informants was also important.

External communication

The ventures' communication directed at general external audiences was the other key source of empirical material. This communication was articulated in media such as the ventures' websites and social media, but also, for example, in press releases and newsletters. Throughout the fieldwork I had the opportunity to attend the entrepreneurs' public presentations, and I was also able to access video-recorded presentations. The analysis of communication in these different media was generally made to understand how the legitimacy of the ventures was discursively pursued. Key aspects of this data included the projected identities of the ventures. Naturally, the analysis of this general communication

contributed to developing an in-depth and holistic understanding of the cases. Websites, in particular, and as argued in each one of the essays ended up assuming a central role as the empirical material upon which I focused my analysis.

Internal documents

Another important source of data were organizational internal documents. These included documents in use, such as guidelines to employees and business plans, as well as archived materials. These latter encompassed a range of diverse documents such as older external public communication, promotional material, different documents on strategy and business plans. Importantly, it was possible to gather presentations tailored to specific audiences, such as investors. Some of the presentations were being used when my fieldwork was ongoing and others were no longer in use and were archived. Again, the main purpose related with the collection of this empirical material pertained to understanding legitimization activities.

Media content

The content of news media about the ventures studied was yet another relevant source of data. I was able to gather interviews given by the entrepreneurs to the media and also different journalistic works on the ventures' activities. This data was pertinent to consolidate my understanding of the cases and also, very importantly, to gain a view of the ventures' institutional environments.

As explained, the above-mentioned sources of data were the main ones in my doctoral research. However, other sources of data, such as notes from observations in the ventures' facilities were also employed. All empirical material was compiled and organized electronically in an archival case record set for each of the articles (Patton, 2015). The interviews and public presentations were transcribed and all handwritten notes were transposed to an electronic format. The copies or prints of internal documents were scanned and media content was also organized in an electronic format.

In the table below (table 3) I detail the empirical material that was collected in each one of the case studies.

Data sources	Essay 1 Playraven	Essay 2 Veen	Essay 3 Lovia
Interviews	- 24 interviews with 18 informants (318 pages of transcripts).	- 15 interviews with 8 informants (212 pages of transcripts).	- 22 interviews with 9 informants (336 pages of transcripts).
Internal documents	- Internal documents such as memos, guides and procedures (from 2014 to 2016, over 40 pages).	- Presentation to investors (2007, 27 pages). - Presentation to different audiences (2008, 15 pages). - Presentation brochure to different audiences (2012, 23 pages). - Presentation to investors and partners (2014, 2 pages). - Business plan used in presentations to investors (2015 and 2016, 26 pages).	- Business plan (2015, 8 pages). - Presentation to investors (2016, 11 pages).
Other archival materials	- 5 press releases (from 2014 to 2016, 8 pages). - 5 public presentations of the CEO (from 2014 to 2016, 48 pages). - 49 articles from international press about Playraven (from 2013 to 2016, 127 pages).	- 6 corporate newsletters (from 2013 to 2016, 16 pages). - 20 press releases (from 2009 to 2016, 23 pages). - 18 articles from international press (from 2007 to 2016, 55 pages). - Ads promoting the venture's products (from 2009 to 2016, 22 pages).	- 9 newsletters (33 pages). - 5 press releases (16 pages). - 13 articles from international press about Lovia (67 pages). - 3 promotional <i>lookbooks</i> (62 pages) - 2 presentations Nordic Awake project (2016, 7 pages).

Table 3. Overview of empirical material collected.

Venture's website	- Website content (114 pages).	- Five versions of the website that range from 2007 to 2016.	- Website content (120 pages).
Social media	- Facebook content (from 2014 to 2016, over 120 pages).	- Facebook and Instagram content (from 2008 to 2016, over 100 pages).	- Facebook and Instagram content (from 2015 to 2017, over 80 pages).
Observation notes	- Over 50 hours of observation at the venture (51 pages of notes). - Participation in public presentations of the CEO (13 pages of notes). - Participation in events related to the venture (5 pages).		- 10 visits to the venture (24 pages). - Participation in events related to the venture (7 pages).

Table 3. Overview of empirical material collected (continued).

The different sources of data resulted in a rich set of empirical material that was further strengthened by the longitudinal process of collection. This depth and breadth of the empirical set allowed the creation of a holistic and comprehensive view of the cases. Although, as mentioned, the interviews were important sources of data, naturally occurring texts, such as the ones collected from diverse communication materials became quite central in my research process. Texts from business plans and presentations to investors, for example, allowed the collection of data directly 'recovered' from the empirical grounds where it was created and used, which contributes to an added validity (Silverman, 1993). Also, with the aim of further strengthening the quality of my approach, I discussed my findings and interpretations with the entrepreneurs of the ventures in the last phase of the fieldwork.

It is important to acknowledge that collecting the texts circulating in the ventures was a challenging task. There is always the possibility of not being able to capture key texts and perspectives, since the empirical settings are complex and dynamic. Different discourses were circulating at the ventures and not all of

them became prominent in my study. I decided to focus my efforts on the discourses that were chiefly promoted and shared by the entrepreneurs, in their own accounts and in their ventures' communication. Hence, I was mainly interested in the pragmatics of the ventures' joint representation of legitimization discourses.

Analysis of empirical material

In general terms, and in a first phase, I analyzed the empirical material in an open manner. The texts collected were repeatedly read with an interest in how legitimization was expressed. In order to assert this, I followed a definition of legitimization as articulating the venture as an appropriate / desirable firm in its field. Explanations about the venture's activities and texts that articulated conformity to or distinctiveness from the field were accordingly considered as potentially related to the articulation of legitimization and investigated in the analysis.

The analysis progressed as I searched for relationships between texts, and as I related the empirical material to existing studies and theoretical frameworks. Thus I gradually developed a theoretical sensitivity (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009) pertaining to legitimization, due to the engagement with the cases and with the literature. In this first phase of analysis I continuously took notes to highlight relevant aspects of the texts.

In a second phase I chose particular theoretical lenses to develop the analysis of the material of each case study. These choices were made according to the purpose and research questions of each one of the essays. In essay 1, I employed discourse analysis to analyze the empirical material (Phillips et al., 2004) and in essay 2 I used narrative analysis (Pentland, 1999; Bal, 2009; Czarniawska 1997; 1998; 2004). Finally, in essay 3 I employed interpretive content analysis to address verbal texts (Miles et al., 2014) and the theoretical framework on visual grammar to analyze images (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996).

In overall terms, my analysis was aimed at abstracting patterns from the empirical material (Cornelissen, 2017). I embraced the particularities and richness of the cases and from there I strove to develop analytical explanations through the identification of the patterns mentioned (Tsoukas, 2009). To this end my processes of analysis were based on creating codes to identify these

more abstract patterns. Over time, I refined these codes by developing new analyses. In a subsequent stage and working with tables, I organized the codes and their characterization, as well as excerpts of empirical material that supported these codes (Miles et al., 2014). I continued to iterate the tables further and to reflect on my analysis as the research evolved. In particular, I continued to take notes and challenge my own interpretations, searching for conceptual/theoretical coherence and checking for possible alternative explanations (Miles et al., 2014).

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Theoretical contributions

In this section, I present a general overview of how my dissertation adds to the current literature.

Legitimation is constructed through verbal and visual discursive strategies

My research brings the literature on discursive strategies of legitimation (Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999; Van Leeuwen, 2007; Vaara and Monin, 2010) into the domain of entrepreneurial legitimation, by establishing a “synthesized coherence” (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997) between these two literatures. In essay 1, I identify the strategies of rationalization, moralization, exemplification, naturalization and narrativization as being employed in the communication of the venture. This typology advances the understanding of the discursive activities of entrepreneurs by providing a detailed view of the types of strategies used to influence audiences. Moreover, this view contributes to expanding recent studies that have pointed out metaphors (Cornelissen et al., 2010; Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010) and arguments (van Werven et al., 2016) as key aspects of discursive legitimation.

Furthermore, in essay 3, I contribute to expanding the literature on discursive legitimation. This literature has essentially been focused on verbal texts (Meyer et al., 2013) and my essay brings the visual into this domain. In particular, the essay identifies discursive strategies grounded in the visual mode of communication that complement the verbal ones already identified in the literature (Vaara and Monin, 2010). I argue that the visual mode is especially suited to sustaining specific strategies. I identify and characterize one strategy for generating visually conformity, and a second one for demonstrating distinctiveness.

Conformity and distinctiveness are entangled in the discursive pursuit of legitimacy

I extend prior research on legitimate distinctiveness (Navis and Glynn, 2011; Voronov et al., 2013) by showing how both conformity and distinctiveness are entangled in discursive terms. Essay 1 provides a view of the micro-discursive aspects of legitimation, by detailing how legitimate distinctiveness is discursively constructed.

Essay 1 shows that by using the same discursive strategies to support opposing claims of conformity and distinctiveness, entrepreneurs are able to tone down the tension between these. On the other hand, a narrative discursive strategy, in particular, was found to be especially relevant to bring together claims that articulate conformity to the organizational field and distinctiveness from it, by providing an explanation about how the different ideas presented are related. In a narrative discursive format, opposing claims of conformity and distinctiveness are rendered as logical elements that function together.

Additionally, essay 1 builds on the concept of the field frame, which contributes to problematizing the homogeneity of audiences and suggests particular attention be paid to how different knowledge within similar types of audiences may be taken into account by the entrepreneurs in their legitimation efforts.

As time unfolds it becomes necessary to renew legitimacy discourses

Some scholars essentially regard legitimacy as a dichotomy: organizations are judged as either legitimate or not (Suchman, 1995; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008). Furthermore, there is the assumption that achieving legitimacy implies reaching a threshold: once it is reached organizations will be considered as legitimate. This view of legitimacy as dichotomous has been challenged by recent studies that suggest regarding legitimacy as an ongoing achievement (Garud, Schildt and Lant, 2014, Fisher et al., 2016; Überbacher et al., 2015). My research contributes to this latter perspective. Essay 2 offers a view of the potential drawbacks ventures face as time unfolds: given changed circumstances, the entrepreneurs in the case studied decided to revise their venture's legitimation story in order to keep it aligned with the new circumstances. After establishing an initial set of legitimacy claims, it is thus es-

sential that entrepreneurs act proactively, over time, in order to anticipate and mitigate eventual legitimacy gaps (Garud, Schildt and Lant, 2014). By renewing their discourses to face changed circumstances entrepreneurs can maintain the plausibility and relevance of their claims as time passes.

Revising legitimization stories implies continuity and change

My research extends previous studies on legitimization stories (e.g. Garud, Schildt and Lant, 2014) by offering a view of the discursive challenges entailed in revising a story. A tension between the continuity of early versions of the story and the changes implied in a revision underlies these challenges. My study shows that to assure continuity, stories' revision should be sustained by the following actions: (1) introducing new discursive elements while proposing modified meanings to previous ones; (2) introducing relational links to renew the plot and to provide plausibility to the changes in the story; (3) reformulating the tension between past, present and future. Finally, the essay expands the existing literature by proposing that in a story revision it is essential to introduce novelty within the logic of the foundational narrative that has underlain the legitimization story over time.

Legitimation is a material practice

Finally, my research also contributes to emphasizing the material dimension of legitimization. I argue that materiality is essential to legitimization since to become influential ideas must be materialized, gaining the capacity to transcend places and endure in time. In essay 1, I suggest that the materiality of websites is important for the legitimization of new ventures. This view corroborates the emphasis of recent studies on the increasing relevance of digital media to legitimization (Sillince and Brown, 2009; Barros, 2014; Fischer and Reuber, 2014). Furthermore, in essay 2, I delve into how legitimization stories are brought into being through the materiality of texts. In particular I explore how revising a story is a practice that is both ideational and material. The process of revising a story is constrained by the materiality of texts previously released and implies the material production of new texts. These perspectives contribute to embracing the materiality of media in the discursive activities of legitimization.

5.2 Managerial implications

In this section I will present managerial implications that derive from the insights of my empirical studies. The purpose is to present a synthesis of the key research findings that have implications for managerial practice. A more thorough discussion on the ideas presented is developed in the essays, and so I indicate below which essays delve specifically into each one of the implications mentioned.

Stories are especially adequate to explain the legitimacy of an organization

Stories are especially well suited to bringing together different ideas and arguments and to giving these meaning. Moreover, a story format commonly facilitates the engagement of audiences and helps to make memorable the ideas presented. Thus a story format is particularly adequate to explain a firm's activities and to convince others of its legitimacy. Stories usually have main actors – the entrepreneurs or the organization itself – and events experienced or caused by these actors. Events can be, for example, the development of an innovation or a happening that is significant for the organization's evolution. A story's plot explains how the events are connected and meaningful, thus providing entrepreneurs with an adequate communicative structure to give a sense of their organization to others.

See more in essays 1 and 2.

Particular communication strategies can help claims of legitimacy

A story format, as just mentioned, is a powerful communication strategy to explain the activities of a company and present these as legitimate. Other strategies also seem to provide an especially adequate format for claiming legitimacy. In addition to stories, entrepreneurs thus have other strategies available. Firstly, ideas can be presented as rational, emphasizing logical arguments. Secondly, entrepreneurs can relate their arguments to values, highlighting the moral dimension of their endeavours. Thirdly, the activities of a firm can also be presented as natural. Finally, examples can be invoked to sustain the legitimacy claims. Together, these communication strategies offer different ways for entre-

preneurs to organize and communicate their ideas in order to convince others of their organizations' legitimacy.

See more in essay 1.

Visual communication is relevant in legitimization

Visuals such as images, drawings and graphics have the potential to sustain specific communication strategies, due to the particular characteristics of visuals. Compared to language-based texts, visuals offer the opportunity to communicate in more implicit ways, and to influence by suggestion, for example. Also, visuals are particularly relevant to express messages that are not intended to be verbalized and to demonstrate facts in a more immediate way than in verbal language. In particular, entrepreneurs can use visuals specifically to suggest the credibility of their ventures, and to show that there is compliance with field expectations. In this strategy, the key aspect is implicitness that suits a communication strategy to expressing messages not intended to be verbalized. On the other hand, visual communication can be specifically employed to demonstrate claims of distinctiveness by literally showing the uniqueness claimed by entrepreneurs in the activities of their organizations.

See more in essay 3.

Pursuing legitimacy implies both conformity and distinctiveness

To be judged as plausible, organizations must follow the norms of their industry. In particular, firms should be aligned with what is considered as appropriate or credible. At the same time, and importantly, organizations must show that they are distinctive from others in the industry. This distinctiveness is essential to convince others of the value of the organization and its activities. Furthermore, this tension between conformity and distinctiveness relates to the organizations' particular industry. In mature industries, expressing distinctiveness will tend to be more relevant than conformity, and in emerging ones, the opposite will hold true. In any case, organizations should be presented both as conforming to their industry but also as different from others in the industry in order to be regarded as legitimate. Stories are especially well suited to present-

ing these claims as logical elements that function together, toning down the opposing tension between them.

See more in essays 1 and 3.

Legitimacy is judged according to audiences' knowledge and expectations

Different groups such as investors and consumers tend to have their own evaluative lenses when judging the legitimacy of an organization. And these judgments are made according to their knowledge about the industry and their expectations toward the organizations. Thus when striving for legitimacy, entrepreneurs should seek understanding of their target audiences' expectations and knowledge. Importantly, this further implies that entrepreneurs may strategically invoke particular legitimacy claims according to their understanding of specific audiences, in order to promote conformity and/or distinctiveness before those audiences.

See more in essay 1.

Legitimacy should be pursued over time

It is not only important for an organization to become regarded as legitimate by key audiences, it is also critical that organizations continue to be evaluated as such over time. Industries' settings will change as time passes, and so the criteria to assess legitimacy will also change. Furthermore, organizations often modify their strategies and their activities over time and so earlier claims can become misaligned with new and changed circumstances. Hence, the communication through which entrepreneurs pursue legitimacy has to be revised and adjusted over time in order to continue to be relevant and to ensure that legitimacy is maintained.

See more in essay 2.

5.3 Limitations of the study

There are always trade-offs involved in the decisions pertaining to a research project and my doctoral dissertation is no exception. By choosing to delve into the discursive aspects of legitimation my study became necessarily focused on a particular facet of legitimation. Although my approach was devised to allow exploring this facet in depth, it is important to acknowledge that legitimation is a complex phenomenon and that my studies address only a part of this phenomenon.

Moreover, the options regarding the theoretical frameworks employed in my research implied disregarding other alternatives, and so there are always decisions that result from my own personal beliefs and interpretations and that naturally impacted how the research was conducted. My decisions as researcher are value-laden (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009) and I acknowledge that the research is bounded by my own personal idiosyncrasies, as well as more broadly by those that pertain to my research environment. Knowledge is not discovered, it is constructed (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). And the social conditions of this construction influence how knowledge comes to be (Sayer, 2000; Easton, 2010).

One relevant limitation of my research is the absence of analysis of the outcomes of the legitimation activities. Legitimacy is a judgment ultimately created by audiences and I have not addressed how the entrepreneurs' legitimation efforts impacted their audiences. Although my focus on how entrepreneurs strive to influence legitimacy assessments was purposive and based on the goal of properly delving into their discursive activities I recognize that not having had the opportunity of studying legitimacy judgments and the dynamics that ensue from legitimation, limits the comprehensiveness of my contribution.

In terms of methods, I acknowledge that by developing a few in-depth case studies, my findings necessarily pertain to the empirical settings addressed and should be regarded within these. My option was to focus on unaddressed research questions and I purposively embraced this trade-off, prioritizing explanation over generalization. In a related vein, my qualitative approach, based on a multitude of data from different sources, in which the context and the temporal evolution of the cases were embraced, was developed within a logic that privileged new insights and in-depth perspectives about legitimation. Hence,

the explanatory nature (Welch et al., 2011) of the case studies addressed implied a limited potential to generalize my research findings. Nonetheless, the results of my work are theoretically relevant by revealing new perspectives on legitimation. This pushes current understandings forward and stakes out the path for future studies that can expand or challenge the perspectives unveiled in my essays.

In terms of data, discourse analysts frequently recognize that social reality has multiple meanings and thus it is necessary to embrace the possibility of different interpretations (Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Golant and Sillince, 2007). This is the case with the kind of the analysis of empirical material that I have performed and so there is always a degree of subjectivity that is important to acknowledge (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). Besides this, in a research project centred on discourses it is also relevant to recognize the situated representativeness of the texts collected. An empirical case is complex, involves different organizational actors and there are certainly more texts circulating than the ones collected by a researcher. Thus the empirical data set is a sample and there is always the possibility that other texts could be circulating and were not captured in my research project.

The logic underlying the kind of interpretative case studies I have developed can be seen, as Brown (2000, p. 55) puts it, as not “a quest for ultimate truth but for a plausible, authoritative, verisimilitudinous, and interesting analysis that enriches our understanding of social phenomena”. Thus although recognizing the limitations mentioned, I believe my research brought into being new perspectives on legitimation that enrich our understanding of this phenomenon. There is certainly much more to be done in future studies and in the next section I will address the paths of inquiry that I deem as more relevant to further explore.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

In this section I point out a number of avenues for future research. First, future studies might address the dynamics between the discursive efforts of entrepreneurs and the legitimacy assessments of audiences. While my research has contributed to understanding how entrepreneurs craft their legitimation dis-

courses, there is a need to uncover how these discursive activities influence audiences and legitimacy judgements. In particular, a holistic view that embraces legitimization efforts and legitimacy assessments holds potential to shed light on how the discursive activities of entrepreneurs impact their organizations' survival and growth.

Second, in my research I have explored how entrepreneurs use particular discursive strategies in order to pursue the legitimacy of their organizations. Future studies might delve into the strategies I have identified and, importantly, strive to reveal new ones. There is a particularly relevant potential in investigating how legitimization strategies are constructed using different communication modes (Meyer et al., 2013). I have analyzed the visual mode, but it is critical to understand how other communication modes are employed by entrepreneurs and, in particular, how strategies are built upon different modes together. Communication in contemporary markets is increasingly multimodal (Kress, 2010) but there continues to be limited understanding how this impacts legitimization activities.

Third, it is fruitful to challenge some of the analytical distinctions that have been prevalent in studies about legitimization. As discussed in the overview of the literature, different paths of research on entrepreneurial legitimization have been built on different traditions. A 'cultural agency' perspective has been essentially focused on the articulation of a venture's comprehensibility and thus on the pursuit of cognitive legitimacy (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Golant and Sillince, 2007; Überbacher, 2014). On the other hand, research on symbolic actions and other forms of impression management has generically been associated with creating attractiveness and desirability, i.e. on the pursuit of evaluative legitimacy (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Golant and Sillince, 2007; Überbacher, 2014). My case studies suggest that these two kinds of legitimization purposes essentially overlap in practice. While the articulation of the ventures' comprehensibility was a fundamental aspect of the cases' communication, sense-giving and symbolism also underlay the texts I have collected. Hence, the analytical distinction between these two types of legitimacy, in terms of discursive legitimization, might be challenged in future research.

Fourth, more research is needed in terms of the dynamics of stories in legitimization. In my empirical settings, the entrepreneurs created an overall dominant narrative, chiefly promoted as the official narrative of the organizations. These dominant narratives are not isolated from other stories circulating in and around new ventures. Actually, many of these stories had some connection with the main narrative actively promoted by the entrepreneurs. On the one hand, particular stories fed this main narrative as it evolved through time and were thus essential to sustaining this main narrative. On the other hand, and importantly, from this dominant narrative stories were then crafted, with a distinctive emphasis, to serve particular purposes and to be articulated in different media. These insights stand in contrast to O'Connor's study (2002), for example, that identified different narratives in the legitimization of a start-up in Silicon Valley. In my empirical settings, there were not exactly different narratives, but rather the same generic narrative that was then adapted to different logics so as to serve separate purposes, namely related to articulating identity, legitimacy, strategy and marketing claims. This pliability of dominant narratives and their potential to offer grounds from where different stories can be crafted is another perspective I deem as relevant to explore in future studies.

Fifth, legitimization communication was found to be especially relevant inside the organizations and future research should further explore this perspective. The focus of my study essentially led me to address the external dimension of the ventures' communication efforts. Nonetheless, in the fieldwork it became noticeable how legitimization was also very relevant to the employees of the ventures and to the entrepreneurs. In particular, and although this perspective was not developed in my essays, sense-making seemed to be closely intertwined with sense-giving. By giving a sense of the ventures' activities to others, entrepreneurs seemed to be making sense to themselves, which in turn influenced subsequent processes of sense-giving. Thus the discursive construction of legitimization seemed to be a process of self-discovery too. Cornelissen et al. (2010) have also recently identified these dynamics, which pave the way for new paths of inquiry.

Sixth, another aspect that is relevant to address in future studies is how legitimacy is pursued in international terms. In my study, I ended up not addressing this angle, but the organizations I studied share an international orientation and this is, in fact, an essential aspect of their businesses. The ventures

sell to international markets and seek resources also in international settings. This cross-boundary positioning offers opportunities and also challenges. However, in terms of legitimation, we know very little about these challenges. Thus more research is needed on the international dimension of legitimation. Seventh, and in a related vein, another avenue for research is addressing the increasing relevance of digital media to the legitimation of entrepreneurial ventures (Sillince and Brown, 2009; Barros, 2014; Fischer and Reuber, 2014). In recent years, digitalization has been changing the nature of competition, consumption and how markets operate. Moreover, increasing connectivity and the availability of online information are impacting the relations between ventures and employees, investors, competitors, consumers and governments. Importantly, in our contemporary global markets, entrepreneurial ventures' audiences often come in contact with these organizations through online media (Coupland and Brown, 2004). However, there is limited understanding of how the increasing relevance of digital media influences entrepreneurial legitimation efforts.

Eighth and finally, the material dimension of discursive legitimation is yet another aspect that I deem as relevant to explore in future studies. In essay 1 I suggested that texts' materiality is essential for legitimation processes: to become influential, ideas must be materialized, gaining an ability to transcend places and endure in time. In essay 2 I argued that story revisions unfold upon materially dispersed texts that both facilitate and constrain change. These insights offer more perspectives for further studies on legitimation.

5.5 Concluding thoughts

To convince others of the legitimacy of their ventures, entrepreneurs face challenges underlied by a tension between difference and similarity. This tension has particular dimensions and in my research, I have shed light on three of them. My first essay details how ventures are discursively presented as being distinctive, and thus needed and valuable in their fields, but also as conforming to these fields. The second essay offers a view of how stories that are crafted to convince others of the organizations' legitimacy evolve, influenced by continuity and change. As time passes and circumstances change, stories must be revised

but also somehow remain similar to previous versions. Hence, there must be a confluence of difference and similarity in the revision of legitimization stories.

Finally, the third essay reveals how the visual mode of communication is employed by entrepreneurs to construct particular strategies of communication. One of the strategies identified relies on employing images to demonstrate claims of uniqueness. And the other strategy identified builds on using images to suggest the organization's belonging to its field, and thus induce credibility. Once again, we have here the tension between difference and similarity, which the visual mode of communication seems to be especially suited to sustain.

In overall terms, my research suggests that the general tension between difference and similarity lies at the core of the pursuit of legitimacy. Embracing this tension, and the multiple challenges that arise from it, is thus essential for entrepreneurs' ability to convince others of their ventures' desirability and appropriateness. My research has delved into these challenges and advanced our understanding of how entrepreneurs can meet them while pursuing the legitimacy of their ventures.

6. Summaries of the essays

In this section, I synthesize the main elements of each of the essays: theoretical gaps and research questions, motivation, theoretical approaches employed, methods, empirical settings and key findings.

6.1 Summary of Essay 1

Essay 1 generally sets the scene for the research phenomenon being addressed in this dissertation. How do entrepreneurs construct their legitimization discourses within their organizational fields? What are the micro-discursive mechanisms employed to influence resource provider audiences? The venture studied in this essay was a new player in the mobile game industry, struggling to attract mainly financial and human resources. In the entrepreneurs' interaction with media, in their public presentations and also generally in the venture's communication, it became noticeable how claims that emphasized conformity to the field were closely intertwined with claims that highlighted the venture's distinctiveness in this field. Thus I decided to explore how this tension was handled in discursive terms. The table below (table 4) synthesizes the key elements of this essay.

Title	Legitimation of new ventures: embracing conformity and distinctiveness.
What is known / not known	We know that new ventures must conform to their environment in order to comply with institutional expectations. At the same time, ventures must also be distinctive from this environment to be regarded as plausible. However, little is known about how entrepreneurs can discursively address this tension in their legitimization efforts.

Table 4. Essay 1 – summary.

Research question	How do new ventures handle the tension between conformity to, and distinctiveness from, their institutional contexts, when discursively striving for legitimacy?
Motivation	An understanding of the discursive means employed by entrepreneurs is particularly relevant to advance current knowledge on legitimation processes and to enable a nuanced view of how discourses sustain the pursuit of new ventures' legitimation.
Key theoretical approaches	The main theoretical approaches employed in this essay are institutional theory and discursive strategies of legitimation.
Methods	To address the research question, I investigated a case company in the mobile game industry. Data collection started in March 2014 and ended in September 2016. I developed interviews with the CEO and most of the venture's employees, as well as collected internal documents and developed observations in regular visits to the firm. However, the analysis relied mostly on empirical material from publicly available sources, such as websites, industry publications and media archives. Discourse analysis was employed to address the empirical material.
Empirical setting	Playraven develops games for touchscreen devices like smartphones and tablets. The venture was founded in the summer of 2013, in Helsinki, by five industry veterans. The games developed by Playraven are distributed in online stores, like those of Apple and Google. In the spring of 2016 there were 24 people working at the venture, with 3 teams developing games simultaneously.
Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legitimation is sustained by particular discursive strategies; - The same discursive strategies are employed to present both conformity and distinctiveness; - Entrepreneurs present their ventures according to their understanding of particular audiences. This way, entrepreneurs strive for conformity or distinctiveness in an implicit way.

Table 4. Essay 1 – summary (continued).

6.2 Summary of Essay 2

Essay 2 delves specifically into one of the legitimization strategies identified in the first essay: stories. In previous literature, a story format seems particularly appropriate to articulate legitimacy claims and my first essay corroborated this view. In essay 2, I push forward a deeper understanding of what is discursively entailed in legitimization stories, and how these can be revised through time. The case study of this essay is an entrepreneurial venture with around eight years of operation that faced the need to revise its story while my fieldwork was ongoing. I was thus in a privileged position to explore how the entrepreneurs handled the tension of revising the legitimization story to keep it relevant in the face of changed circumstances, while also trying to assure the continuity of the original story that led to the support of key resource providers. This essay thus establishes an explicit view of what the discursive elements of a legitimization story are, and from there investigates the tension between change and continuity.

Title	Changing without changing: the revision of entrepreneurial legitimization stories.
What is known / not known	Stories are discursive means commonly employed to explain ventures' distinct characteristics and legitimacy claims. However, and through time, stories can become misaligned with changed circumstances such as changes in the competitive landscapes. While entrepreneurs may revise their ventures' stories to cope with these changes, preserving the continuity of the foundational story that ensured success in the first place is essential, in order to avoid scepticism or distrust from audiences. Current studies on entrepreneurial settings have essentially addressed why stories have to be changed and have suggested that re-plotting is the key mechanism for these changes. However, we know little about what is actually implied in modifying a story. In particular, there is a lack of understanding of the discursive aspects involved in a story revision that encompasses continuity and change.
Research question	How do entrepreneurs manage the tension of changing their ventures' stories to face changed circumstances, while also preserving continuity?

Table 5. Essay 2 – summary.

Motivation	An understanding of how entrepreneurs keep their stories relevant as ventures grow and expand is essential to developing effective legitimization communication and obtaining continued access to key resources.
Key theoretical approaches	Narrative theory is the main theoretical framework employed.
Methods	I developed a case study of a venture and followed its activities for over three years, being able to track the changes in the revision of its legitimization story. The fieldwork started in September 2013 and ended in December 2016. Main sources of data include interviews, internal documents and the venture's communication. I employed narrative analysis to address the empirical material.
Empirical settings	Veen is a venture that commercializes water sourced in Finnish Lapland. Veen's story had to be changed to accommodate a new international strategy and a renewed product portfolio that from 2015 onwards started to include water sourced in Bhutan.
Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revising a legitimization narrative while pursuing continuity involves introducing new narrative elements and proposing modified meanings to previous ones; introducing new relational links that sustain a change in plot and provide plausibility to this change; reformulating the tension between past, present and future in the new plot, and keeping some narrative elements unchanged from previous versions of the story; - Revising a narrative is an ideational practice as much as it is a material one.

Table 5. Essay 2 – summary (continued).

6.3 Summary of Essay 3

Essay 3 also builds on essay 1, extending the findings on discursive strategies of legitimization to the visual mode of communication. The essay is based on the case study of a venture in the fashion industry that I followed from the beginning of its activities and over two years. Struggling mostly to gain the support of investors and business partners, the entrepreneurs employed the discursive strategies identified in essay 1 to strive for legitimacy. However, visual texts emerged in the data set as especially relevant in this pursuit and I decided to explore how the visual mode was employed in legitimization efforts.

Title	The visual legitimization of new ventures.
What is known / not known	Research on entrepreneurial legitimization has been essentially focused on written and oral accounts. However, with the proliferation of new media and Internet, legitimization has naturally expanded from language-based accounts to other modes, like the visual. Thus a narrow focus on verbal texts hinders the development of the understanding of how legitimacy is being pursued
Research question	How do entrepreneurs use the visual mode of communication to legitimize their new ventures?
Motivation	Visual communication is pervasive in contemporary markets and unveiling how this mode impacts legitimization is thus timely and pertinent.
Key theoretical approaches	A social semiotics approach to the affordances of the visual mode of communication is central in the development of this paper.
Methods	The research builds on a case study of Lovia, a venture that I have followed from January 2015 to April 2017. Sources of data include interviews with the entrepreneurs and other persons in the venture; notes from informal talks and from observations made during visits to the venture and events related to its activities; copies of internal documents like business plans and press releases, the content of the venture's communication in media such as the website, social media and news in the press. Visual grammar was employed to address the visual empirical material, and interpretive content analysis to examine verbal texts.
Empirical setting	Three Finnish entrepreneurs founded the venture Lovia in the summer of 2014. In May 2015, the first products were presented in the venture's website store. The entrepreneurs design women's clothes, bags, and accessories like jewellery. Lovia's products are manufactured in Finland and Italy. The products are targeted at high-end consumers, with a special focus on international markets.
Findings	The entrepreneurs engaged in discursive legitimization strategies grounded in the visual mode of communication.

Table 6. Essay 3 – summary.

7. Epilogue

Now at the end of my doctoral research journey I realize that, as a scholar, I share legitimization concerns that are essentially similar to the ones of the entrepreneurs I have followed in the last years. I, like them, need to be regarded as credible in my field. Colleagues, funding bodies, empirical subjects... all have expectations. And, often without much thought, I end up communicating in a way that complies with their different expectations. I must not only conform to field expectations, but I must also show distinctiveness. I must adapt my actions and communication to different audiences and social settings, and I must seek to understand how expectations are changing through time... and all these, almost always, in an intuitive way. In this game that is social life, we seem to be pursuing our legitimacy as we go along. And, as important as what we do, is the communication about what we do. It seems I will not get my doctoral degree if I do not present this written report. And without my doctoral degree, without the legitimacy conveyed by it, I will hardly be able to continue doing research in the academic field.

I also share something else with the entrepreneurs with whom I was fortunate to meet and learn, during the course of my doctoral research. In their endeavours, entrepreneurs seem to be driven by the will to change the world and make it a better place. And that is exactly what I aim for in my own endeavours. Why else would I be doing research?

References

- Aldrich, H., & Fiol, M. (1994). Fools rush in? The institutional context of industry creation. *Academy of Management Review*, 19(4), 645-670.
- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2007). Constructing mystery: Empirical matters in theory development. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1265-1281.
- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2011). *Qualitative research and theory development: Mystery as method*. London: Sage Publications.
- Alvesson, M., & Sköldbberg, K. (2009). *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Gibbs, B. W. (1990). The double-edge of organizational legitimation. *Organization Science*, 1, 177-194.
- Bal, M. (2009). *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative* (3rd ed.). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Bansal, P., & Corley, K. (2011). The coming of age for qualitative research: Embracing the diversity of qualitative methods. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(2), 233-237.
- Barros, M. (2014). Tools of Legitimacy: The Case of the Petrobras Corporate Blog. *Organization Studies*, 35(8), 1211-1230.
- Baum, J. A. C., & Powell, W. W. (1995). Cultivating an institutional ecology of organizations: Comment on Hannan, Carroll, Dundon, and Torres. *American Sociological Review*, 60(4), 529-538.
- Bhaskar, R. (1997). *A realist theory of science* (2nd ed). London: Verso.
- Bhaskar, R. (1998). *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences* (3rd ed.) London: Routledge.
- Bitektine, A. (2011). Toward a theory of social judgments of organizations: the case of legitimacy, reputation, and status. *Academy of Management Review*, 36, 151-179.

- Bitektine, A., & Haack, P. (2015). The “macro” and the “micro” of legitimacy: Toward a multilevel theory of the legitimacy process. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1), 49-75.
- Brown, A. D. (2000). Making sense of inquiry sensemaking. *Journal of Management Studies*, 37(1), 45-75.
- Carland, J. W., Hoy, F, Boulton, W., & Carland, J. A. (1994). Differentiating entrepreneurs from small business owners: A conceptualization. *Academy of Management Review*, 9(2), 354-359.
- Carlile, T. R., Nicolini, D., Langley, A., & Tsoukas, H. (Eds.) (2013). *How Matter Matters. Objects, Artifacts, and Materiality in Organization Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cornelissen, J. P. (2017). Preserving theoretical divergence in management research: Why the explanatory potential of qualitative research should be harnessed rather than suppressed. *Journal of Management Studies*, 54(3), 368-383.
- Cornelissen, J. P., & Clarke, J. S. (2010). Imagining and rationalizing opportunities: inductive reasoning and the creation and justification of new ventures. *Academy of Management Review*, 35, 539-557.
- Cornelissen, J. P., Clarke, J. S., & Cienki, A. (2010). Sensegiving in entrepreneurial contexts: The use of metaphors in speech and gesture to gain and sustain support for novel business ventures. *International Small Business Journal*, 30(3), 213-241.
- Coupland, C., & Brown, A. D. (2004). Constructing Organizational Identities on the Web: A Case Study of Royal Dutch/Shell. *Journal of Management Studies*, 41(8), 1325-1347.
- Czarniawska, B. (1997). *Narrating the organization: Dramas of institutional identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Czarniawska, B. (1998). *A narrative approach to organization studies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Czarniawska, B. (2004). *Narratives in social science research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Czarniawska, B., & Joerges, B. (1996). Travel of ideas. In B. Czarniawska and G. Sevón (Eds.), *Translating Organizational Change* (pp. 13-48). Berlin: De Gruyter.

- Deephouse, D. L., & Suchman, M. (2008). Legitimacy in organizational institutionalism. In R., Greenwood, Oliver, C., Sahlin, K., & Suddaby, R. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism* (pp. 49-77). London: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- DiMaggio, P., & Powell, W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 147-160.
- DiMaggio, P., & Powell, W. (1991). Introduction. In W. W. Powell & P. J. DiMaggio (Eds.), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (pp. 1-28). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dubois, A., & Gadde, L. E. (2014). "Systematic combining"—A decade later. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(6), 1277-1284.
- Easton, G. (2010). Critical realism in case study research. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(1), 118-128.
- Etzion, D., & Ferraro, F. (2010). The role of analogy in the institutionalization of sustainability reporting. *Organization Science*, 21(5), 1092-1107.
- Fischer, E., & Reuber, A. R. (2014). Online entrepreneurial communication: Mitigating uncertainty and increasing differentiation via Twitter. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 29(4), 565-583.
- Fisher, G., Kotha, S., & Lahiri, A. (2016). Changing with the times: An integrated view of identity, legitimacy and new venture life cycles. *Academy of Management Review*, 41(3), 383-409.
- Fisher, G., Kuratko, D. F., Bloodgood, J. M., & Hornsby, J. S. (2017). Legitimate to whom? The challenge of audience diversity and new venture legitimacy. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 32(1), 52-71.
- Garud, R., Gehman, J., & Giuliani, A. (2014). Contextualizing entrepreneurial innovation: A narrative perspective. *Research Policy*, 43, 1177-1188.
- Garud, R., Schildt, H.A., & Lant, T.K. (2014). Entrepreneurial Storytelling, Future Expectations, and the Paradox of Legitimacy. *Organization Science*, 25(5), 1479-1492.
- Golant, B. D., & Sillince, J. A. (2007). The constitution of organizational legitimacy: A narrative perspective. *Organization studies*, 28(8), 1149-1167.
- Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin, and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Hatch, M. J. (2012). *Organization theory: modern, symbolic and postmodern perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hodder, I. (2012). *Entangled: An archaeology of the relationships between humans and things*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.
- Jones, C., & Massa, F. (2013). From novel practice to consecrated exemplar: Unity Temple as a case of institutional evangelizing. *Organization Studies*, 34(8), 1099-1136.
- Karlsson, T., & Honig, B. (2009). Judging a business by its cover: an institutional perspective on new ventures and the business plan. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 24, 27-45.
- Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. London: Arnold.
- Leonardi, P. (2012). Materiality, Sociomateriality, and Socio-Technical Systems: What Do These Terms Mean? How are They Different? Do We Need Them? In P. M. Leonardi, B. A. Nardi, & J. Kallinikos (Eds), *Materiality and Organizing: Social Interaction in a Technological World* (pp. 25-48). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Leonardi, P. M., & Barley, S. R. (2010). What's under construction here? Social action, materiality, and power in constructivist studies of technology and organizing. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 4(1), 1-51.
- Locke, K., & Golden-Biddle, K. (1997). Constructing opportunities for contribution: Structuring intertextual coherence and "problematizing" in organizational studies. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(5), 1023-1062.
- Lounsbury, M., & Glynn, M. A. (2001). Cultural entrepreneurship: Stories, legitimacy, and the acquisition of resources. *Strategic Management Journal*, 22, 545-564.
- Martens, M.L., Jennings, J.E., & Jennings, P.D. (2007). Do the stories they tell get them the money they need? The role of entrepreneurial narratives in resource acquisition. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(5), 1107-1132.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *A realist approach for qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- McKendrick, D. G., & Carroll, G. R. (2001). On the genesis of organizational forms: evidence from the market for disk arrays. *Organization Science*, 12, 661-682.
- Meyer, J. W. & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(2) 340-363.
- Meyer, R. E., Höllerer, M. A., Jancsary, D., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2013). The visual dimension in organizing, organization, and organization research: Core ideas, current developments, and promising avenues. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 7(1), 489-555.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Navis, C., & Glynn, M. A. (2011). Legitimate distinctiveness and the entrepreneurial identity: Influence on investor judgments of new venture plausibility. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(3), 479-499.
- O'Connor, E. (2002). Storied business: Typology, intertextuality, and traffic in entrepreneurial narrative. *Journal of Business Communication*, 39(1), 36-54.
- O'Connor, E. (2004). Storytelling to be real: Narrative, legitimacy building, and venturing. In D. Hjort & C. Steyaert (Eds.), *Narrative and Discursive Approaches in Entrepreneurship* (pp. 105-124). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Pentland, B. T. (1999). Building process theory with narrative: From description to explanation. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(4), 711-724.
- Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Phillips, N., Lawrence, T. B., & Hardy, C. (2004). Discourse and institutions. *Academy of Management Review*, 29(4), 635-652.
- Phillips, N., & Osrick, C. (2012). Organizational Discourse: Domains, Debates, and Directions. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 6(1), 435-481.
- Piekkari, R., & Welch, C. (2011). Pluralism in international business and international management research: making the case. In R. Piekkari & C. Welch (Eds.), *Rethinking the Case Study in International Business and Management Research* (pp. 3-23). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Piekkari, R., Welch, C., & Paavilainen, E. (2009) The case study as disciplinary convention: Evidence from international business journals. *Organizational Research Methods* 12(3), 567-589.

- Reyes, A. (2011). Strategies of legitimization in political discourse: From words to actions. *Discourse & Society*, 22(6), 781-807.
- Rindova, V., & Kotha, S. (2001). Continuous “morphing”: Competing through dynamic capabilities, form, and function. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44, 1263-1280.
- Ruef, M., & Scott, W. R. (1998). A multidimensional model of organizational legitimacy: Hospital survival in changing institutional environments. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 43, 877-904.
- Sayer, A. (2000). *Realism and social science*. London: Sage.
- Scott, W. R. (1995). *Institutions and Organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Sillince, J. A., & Brown, A. D. (2009). Multiple organizational identities and legitimacy: The rhetoric of police websites. *Human Relations*, 62(12), 1829-1856.
- Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting Qualitative Data. Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*. London: Sage.
- Simons, H. (2009). *Case study research in practice*. London: Sage publications.
- Singh, J. V., Tucker, D. J., & House, R. J. (1986). Organizational legitimacy and the liability of newness. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 31, 171-93.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Stinchcombe, A. L. (1965). Social structure and organizations. In J. G. March, (Ed.), *Handbook of Organizations* (pp. 142–193). Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review* 20(3), 729-757.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851.
- Tsoukas, H. (2009). Craving for generality and small-N studies: A Wittgensteinian approach towards the epistemology of the particular in organization and management studies. In D. Buchanan & A. Bryman (Eds), *Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods* (pp. 285-301). London: Sage.
- Überbacher, F. (2014). Legitimation of new ventures: A review and research programme. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(4), 667-698.
- Überbacher, F., Jacobs, C. D., & Cornelissen, J. P. (2015). How entrepreneurs become skilled cultural operators. *Organization Studies*, 36(7), 925-951.

- Vaara, E., & Monin, P. (2010). A recursive perspective on discursive legitimation and organizational action in mergers and acquisitions. *Organization Science*, 21(1), 3-22.
- Vaara, E., Sonenshein, S., & Boje, D. (2016). Narratives as Sources of Stability and Change in Organizations: Approaches and Directions for Future Research. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 10(1), 495-560.
- Vaara, E., Tienari, J., & Laurila, J. (2006). Pulp and paper fiction: On the discursive legitimation of global industrial restructuring. *Organization Studies*, 27(6), 789-813.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2007). Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse & Communication*, 1(1), 91-112.
- Van Leeuwen, T., & Wodak, R. (1999). Legitimizing immigration control: A discourse-historical analysis. *Discourse Studies*, 1(1), 83-118.
- van Maanen, J., Sörensson, J., & Mitchell, T. (2007). The interplay between theory and method. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1145-1154.
- van Werven, R., Bouwmeester, O., & Cornelissen, J. P. (2015). The power of arguments: How entrepreneurs convince stakeholders of the legitimate distinctiveness of their ventures. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 30(4), 616-631.
- Voronov, M., De Clercq, D., & Hinings, C. R. (2013). Conformity and distinctiveness in a global institutional framework: The legitimation of Ontario fine wine. *Journal of Management Studies*, 50(4), 607-645.
- Weber, K., & Dacin, M. T. (2011). The cultural construction of organizational life: Introduction to the special issue. *Organization Science*, 22(2), 287-298.
- Weber, K., Heinze, K. L., & Desoucey, M. (2008). Forage for thought: mobilizing codes in the movement for grass-fed meat and dairy products. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 53, 529-567.
- Welch, C., Piekkari, R., Plakoyiannaki, E., & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, E. (2011). Theorising from case studies: Towards a pluralist future for international business research. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42(5), 740-762.
- Welch, C. & Piekkari, R. (2017). How should we (not) judge the 'quality' of qualitative research? A re-assessment of current evaluative criteria in International Business. *Journal of World Business*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2017.05.007>

- Zimmerman, M. A., & Zeitz, G. J. (2002). Beyond survival: achieving new venture growth by building legitimacy. *Academy of Management Review*, 27, 414-431.
- Zott, C., & Huy, Q. N. (2007). How entrepreneurs use symbolic management to acquire resources. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 52, 70-105.
- Zucker, L. G. (1977). The role of institutionalization in cultural persistence. *American Sociological Review*, 42, 726-743.

The main purpose of this research has been to develop a rich understanding of how entrepreneurs discursively strive to legitimate their firms. The dissertation is composed of three essays, each one based on the case of an entrepreneurial venture and focusing on a particular facet of discursive legitimation.

Revealed here are the discursive strategies employed by entrepreneurs in pursuit of their organizations' legitimacy. These strategies are based on both the verbal and the visual modes of communication. Furthermore, this study shows that a tension between distinctiveness and similarity underlies the challenges faced by entrepreneurs when pursuing the legitimacy of their organizations, and sheds light on these challenges.



ISBN 978-952-60-7664-5 (printed)

ISBN 978-952-60-7665-2 (pdf)

ISSN-L 1799-4934

ISSN 1799-4934 (printed)

ISSN 1799-4942 (pdf)

Aalto University
School of Business
Department of Management Studies
www.aalto.fi

**BUSINESS +
ECONOMY**

**ART +
DESIGN +
ARCHITECTURE**

**SCIENCE +
TECHNOLOGY**

CROSSOVER

**DOCTORAL
DISSERTATIONS**