



# Entrepreneurial Opportunity: An Analysis in Terms of Scripts

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**Abstract.** There have been calls to end the debates on the concept of entrepreneurial opportunity. However, the remarkable growth of the research on the ontological and epistemological nature of entrepreneurial opportunities highlights the value of a thorough understanding of this concept in relation to entrepreneurship. This study addresses the ‘war of opportunities’ by answering the following question: How does an entrepreneur select, reproduce or modify scripts to imagine an entrepreneurial opportunity? The result is a discussion on the debate between the discovery and creation of opportunity approaches, revealing that the nexus of individuals and opportunities is a process entailing the selection, reproduction and modification of scripts of signification, legitimization and domination.

**Keywords:** sequential process of structuration, nexus, opportunity, entrepreneur, scripts.

## 1. Introduction

Authors such as Davidsson (2017a, 2017b) invite us to abandon debates on the concept of entrepreneurial opportunity. However, the remarkable growth of the research on the ontological and epistemological nature of entrepreneurial opportunities highlights the value of a thorough understanding of this concept in terms of entrepreneurship (Shu et al., 2018; Wood & McKinley, 2020; Ramoglou, 2021). Indeed, there is considerable scientific interest in understanding the emergence of entrepreneurial opportunities in order to understand how organisations emerge and produce new products and services (Seyb et al., 2019;

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Baldacchino & Boffa, 2022). To date, related research has significantly improved our understanding of the emergence of business opportunities, including theoretical arguments concerning how they are discovered or created (Wood & McKinley, 2010).

While research on entrepreneurial opportunity has long suffered from a lack of fundamental theory (Davidsson, 2015; Ramoglou, 2021), there have been considerable state-of-the-art developments in this regard since Shane and Venkataraman (2000) proposed a theory of entrepreneurship centring on Kirzner's (1979) vision of entrepreneurial opportunities as an objective phenomenon that exists independently of the entrepreneur's action. Although the research on business opportunity has traditionally been dominated by this functionalist and normative approach (Germain & Jacquemin, 2017), competing ontological approaches—particularly creation (Alvarez & Barney, 2007) and actualisation (Ramoglou & Tsang, 2016) approaches—are gaining ground (Wood & McKinley, 2020; Ramoglou, 2021).

Moreover, while this theoretical breakthrough has led to an interesting debate about the nature of entrepreneurial opportunities, it has recently prompted some authors to discuss the 'opportunity war' (Wood & McKinley, 2020), which refers to the abandon or maintenance of the concept of opportunity in the field of entrepreneurship (Davidsson, 2017a; Wood & McKinley, 2020). This war shows that the lack of clarity in conceptualising the nexus between entrepreneurs and opportunities represents a major reason why the research on entrepreneurial opportunity has not been able to provide a solid theoretical foundation. The discovery approach emphasises the influence of social structures on human agency, while the creation approach conceptualises entrepreneurial opportunity as a social construct implemented through entrepreneurial agency.

Some studies have incorporated meta-theories into the discourse on creation and discovery. For instance, Alvarez et al. (2014) associate discovery with critical realism and creation with evolutionary realism. Ramoglou and Tsang (2016) introduce critical realism as an intermediate pathway between empiricism and constructivism in the conceptualisation of opportunities. Each philosophical tradition in the sciences represents a distinct worldview, while clarifying the meta-theory from the outset allows for a clearer understanding of the hypotheses concerning the relationship between entrepreneurs and opportunities (Sarason & Conger, 2018).

Dualism refers to the conceptualisation of opposing elements, such as the Platonic distinction between the sensible world and the world of ideas or the separation between mind and body proposed by Descartes. In management sciences, this dualism manifests as the tension between agency and structure (Giddens, 1984), while in the field of entrepreneurship, this dynamic is reflected in the dualism between entrepreneurs and opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Conversely, duality conceptualises two constructs as being interdependent, illustrating the notion that entrepreneurs and social structures

must be viewed as a duality (Sarason et al., 2006). These two elements interact and co-evolve to create opportunities.

We do not intend to demonstrate the superiority of one approach over the others. Instead, we suggest that if the meta-theory employed to understand the ontological and epistemological nature of entrepreneurial opportunities is clarified from the outset, hypotheses regarding the constructs representing dualities or dualism will be accepted rather than debated. Meta-theories embody worldviews, delineating the nature of the world, the place of the individual and their potential relationships (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These fundamental beliefs cannot be ultimately validated and engender understandings of both key entities within a field of study and their interactions, thus integrating ontological and epistemological enquiries.

In this sense, some authors (Jack & Anderson, 2002; Chiasson & Saunders, 2005; Sarason et al., 2006, 2010) propose Giddens' (1984) structuration theory as a meta-theory for understanding the nexus between entrepreneurial opportunity and entrepreneurs. The central concept of structuration theory is duality. The authors who mobilise this concept inscribe to the nexus of individual opportunity in relation to the creation approach (Sarason et al., 2006, 2010). However, the mobilisation of the concept of duality has been criticised by Mole and Mole (2010), who point out that the nexus between opportunity and entrepreneurship is a form of dualism (Archer, 1995) that ascribes it to the discovery approach. Moreover, structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) has been the subject of criticism in the literature, being considered extremely philosophical and abstract (Gregson, 1987; Bauman, 1989). Barley and Tolbert (1997) propose the sequential process of structuration to overcome the limits of empirical validation of structuration theory and create a nexus between the abstract concepts proposed by Giddens (1984) and concrete phenomena through the mobilisation of the notion of scripts at the meso level. In this regard, *'scripts are observable; they are recurring activities and characteristic modes of interaction within a particular context'* (Barley & Tolbert, 1997, p. 98). Barley (1989) also explores scripts at the intersection of psychology and sociology, assigning to them a mediating role between human agency and social structure.

Chiasson and Saunders (2005) emphasise the value of mobilising Barley and Tolbert's (1997) model at the empirical level to analyse the nexus of individuals and opportunities through the observation of behavioural scripts. Paradoxically, Chiasson and Saunders (2005) do not provide any empirical results. Therefore, the proposals of Chiasson and Saunders (2005) remain theoretical, i.e. without empirical validation, and do not concretely explain the articulation and interaction between entrepreneurs, opportunities and scripts. As a consequence, we extend the research of Chiasson and Saunders (2005) by analysing the extent to which the sequential process of structuration (Barley & Tolbert, 1997) constitutes a relevant theoretical corpus with which to understand and analyse the nexus of individual and entrepreneurial opportunity. Hence, this study adopts an

empirical testing perspective. We mobilise the sequential process of structuration proposed by Barley and Tolbert (1997) to conduct an in-depth analysis of this social process and analyse the interaction between the entrepreneur, social structures and scripts. The goal is to understand how scripts are mobilised, produced, reproduced or modified through entrepreneurs' actions. As a result, we ask the following research question: *How does an entrepreneur select, reproduce or modify scripts to imagine an entrepreneurial opportunity?* The term 'imagination' employed in this article (and particularly in our research question) refers to studies that encompass both the discovery and creation approaches (Ghamgui & Soparnot, 2022). Initially, this term was primarily associated with proponents of the creation approach. For instance, Gartner et al. (2003) assert that opportunity resides in the minds of entrepreneurs, while according to Venkataraman and Sarasvathy (2001), the creation of opportunities relies on the 'capacity for human imagination' possessed by entrepreneurs. However, in recent years, some advocates of the discovery approach have also begun to adopt the term 'imagination'. For example, Tang et al. (2012) highlight how entrepreneurial alertness, a concept developed by Kirzner (1979), enables certain individuals to discover opportunities. They further note that Kirzner (1979) considers 'imagination' and imaginative action in formulating the notion of entrepreneurial alertness. In this context, Oyson and Whittaker (2015) contend that 'imagination' is an important cognitive source for the discovery of opportunities.

To address these issues, we mobilise a qualitative study of five cases of business creation in different fields to increase the variety of situations studied. Moreover, this study aims to respond to the call from several researchers to address the conceptual fragmentation within the entrepreneurial opportunity paradigm (Williams & Wood, 2015). We argue that a deeper understanding can be achieved by considering both the discovery and creation approaches, rather than by limiting ourselves to a reductionist approach that favours a better conceptualisation (Sarason & Conger, 2018), especially when it comes to complex social phenomena such as entrepreneurial activity. Our analysis suggests that the sequential structuration process (Barley & Tolbert, 1997) transcends the ontological debate between discovery and creation, offering researchers a practical approach to studying the interaction between structures, entrepreneurs and scripts. At the meso level, the use of scripts creates common ground between these two approaches, allowing for the exploration of how individuals and opportunities interact, particularly through the selection, production and modification of scripts. This framework thus provides both an objective and a subjective view of opportunity, thereby reconciling the different approaches (Chiasson & Saunders, 2005; Buenstorf, 2007). Our findings emphasise that the imagination of an opportunity is a shared construction—that is, an iterative process where the entrepreneur's beliefs are constantly adjusted (Wood & McKinley, 2010) through the mobilisation of various scripts. We propose that further clarification of the ontological and epistemological assumptions regarding

the subjectivity and objectivity of entrepreneurial opportunity, as well as consideration of their commensurability, can offer alternative perspectives (Sarason & Conger, 2018).

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. The next section presents the main research approaches concerning the nature of entrepreneurial opportunities, followed by our theoretical framework based on structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) and the sequential structuring process (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). We then describe our methodological approach, before presenting and discussing the research findings. This paper concludes by highlighting its theoretical and managerial contributions.

## **2. A Theoretical Framework Based on Structuration Theory and the Notion of Scripts**

First, we introduce the dominant approaches in the research on the nexus between individuals and opportunities. Second, we present the main concepts associated with structuration theory (Giddens, 1984). Finally, we discuss the sequential process of structuration (Barley & Tolbert, 1997).

### *2.1. Dominant Approaches in the Research on the Nexus of Individuals and Opportunities*

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) situate the nexus of entrepreneurs and opportunities at the heart of the entrepreneurship research (Alvarez & Barney, 2007; Baron, 2008). However, at the ontological and theoretical levels, there is ambiguity in defining this nexus (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003; Alvarez & Barney, 2007; Corbett, 2007; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006; Klein, 2008; Davidsson, 2015). In fact, debate on the ontological, epistemological and theoretical nature of the nexus of individual and entrepreneurial opportunity arises between researchers (Chiasson & Saunders, 2005; Alvarez & Barney, 2010; Ramoglou, 2013; Alvarez et al., 2014; Alvarez & Barney, 2014; Suddaby et al., 2015; Adom Asante & Affum-Osei, 2019). A critical reading of the literature makes it possible to determine that this debate is mainly based on three considerations (see Table 1).

Table 1- Opposition between the approaches of discovery and creation

History of PLATE
The entrepreneur is 47 years old at the time of creation. She did a DEA in the field of artificial intelligence at Paris-Dauphine University in 1994. Then, she held the position of Director of IT Programs and led several teams at different groups such as Crédit Agricole, BNP Paribas and BPCE Crédit Foncier. At Crédit Foncier, she managed to adapt a schedule to find a balance between her professional and family life, which proved complicated because she had a child with special needs. Despite this effort on the schedule, in 2016, the entrepreneur was physically tired and decided to resign. In 2017, she noticed that she had become an expert in the peculiarities of her son and everything around him. She read a lot of books and met a lot of people. She found herself coaching parents whose children are in the same situation as her son.
History of CROQ
The entrepreneur is 28 years old at the time of creation. He was not interested in studies. He got his bachelor's degree, but he always wanted to start a business since the age of 15. After his baccalaureate, he began a BTS training in electricity. But at the end of the second year, less interested in this training he dropped out of school. His history of business creation goes back a long way to his childhood. His mother and grandmother passed on to him the love of traditional dishes croque-monsieur. His grandmother introduced him to traditional cuisine since the age of 8. With his mother, they became interested in the marriage of traditional and modern dishes.
History of FRANCI
The entrepreneur is 57 years old at the time of creation. He left school at the age of 15 to start working life as a photoengraver. In 1990, he decided to make a reconversion of profession. He always loved prospecting in the field, so he was hired as a salesman in a company. He lived very well from his job until 2014. In 2016, talking with his friend (a butcher), he was informed that there are no self-service butchers. So, he had the idea of creating a chain of cutting companies and trade in semi-wholesale and retail in self-service butchers.
History of POTA
The entrepreneur is 49 years old at the time of creation. She had an employee career at EDF in the field of marketing and communication. After 20 years of experience at EDF and at the age of 40 she gave birth to her daughter. She tried to take advantage of this baby and take time to consider what she could do professionally. She had business creation ideas that she had not implemented because she did not want to leave her comfort zone as an employee in a large company. To have a balance between her family and professional life, she took the decision to create a company by taking advantage of an extremely favorable device for employees within EDF, namely spin-offs.
History of VISUPRET
The entrepreneur is 32 years old at the time of creation. She immigrated to France at the age of 22. She studied management. Then, she turned to the world of ready-to-wear where she gained experience in terms of store management (franchise, accounting, human resources ...). She has a family of entrepreneurs, but she did not want to start in this world too early because she wanted to have experience, seek to position herself financially, acquire a little stability before starting her own business. It was the day she had her first child, that she found a little stability to think seriously about an idea of starting a business. Young mom, VISUPRET loves to shop on the internet, so she found that there are missing visual elements on websites. She therefore took the decision to create a visual database of products sold on the internet.

First, the question of the objective or subjective nature of opportunity refers to the difficulty in defining the concept of a social structure. The discovery approach focuses on entrepreneurs' cognitive behaviours and characteristics, underlining the objective positioning between the entrepreneur and their environment. By contrast, the creation approach draws attention to entrepreneurs' inner and subjective worlds, considering the entrepreneur's interpretation of their environment to be a key concept that allows them to elevate their imagination beyond the structural constraints of their environment and imagine alternative social, economic and political arrangements.

The second issue concerns the nexus between entrepreneurs and opportunities. As part of the creation approach, this nexus is conceptualised as a duality (Giddens, 1984), while it is conceptualised as dualism (the separability of actors and structures) according to the discovery approach. Furthermore, according to the discovery approach, this dualism (Archer, 1995) is made possible because the entrepreneur and the opportunity evolve in stages over different periods (Mole & Mole, 2010).

The third consideration refers to the analysis and the direction of the researcher's observation. In other words, researchers who focus on the micro level, thereby adopting a discovery approach, are predisposed to concentrating on the objective and deterministic elements of the connection between the individual and the opportunity. Hence, the outside world seems much more objective, powerful and agentic. However, when researchers observe from the top down—that is, from a macro perspective—adopting a creation approach, they have a much more intersubjective and dynamic view of this nexus, meaning that the boundary between individuals and their environments is much less distinct. This third consideration emphasises that the direction of observation and analysis creates the opposition between the two approaches (Suddaby et al., 2015).

Researchers' interest in understanding entrepreneurial opportunities' ontological and epistemological nature continues to grow (Scheaf et al., 2020), although recent studies have discussed the abundance or maintenance of literature on the concept of opportunity in the field of entrepreneurship (Davidsson, 2017a; Wood & McKinley, 2020). Here, a growing number of researchers (Chiasson & Saunders, 2005; Zahra, 2008; Venkataraman et al., 2012; Garud & Giuliani, 2013; Casanova et al., 2019; Ghamgui & Soparnot, 2022) have proposed methods to reconcile the two approaches. Indeed, the nexus between entrepreneurs and social structures is dynamic, as entrepreneurs not only respond to contextual influences but also actively shape them (Jack & Anderson, 2002; Champenois & Jack, 2022). Some researchers (Jack & Anderson, 2002; Chiasson & Saunders, 2005; Sarason et al., 2006, 2010; Ghamgui & Soparnot, 2020) have suggested that analyses must simultaneously integrate the concepts of social structure and human agency to understand and analyse the nexus of individuals and opportunities. These authors propose structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) as a meta-theory that considers both structure and agency to provide an ontological

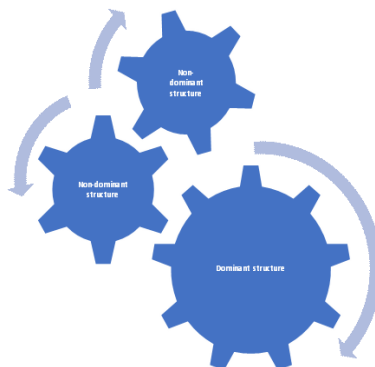
alternative to the two competing approaches. However, few studies have mobilised this theory in the entrepreneurship field, particularly when seeking to understand the nexus of entrepreneurs and opportunities (Ghamgui & Soparnot, 2022). This lack of research may be because structuration theory provides little empirical guidance on studying how an actor's daily actions revise or reproduce social structures (Barley & Tolbert, 1997).

## *2.2. Structuration Theory at the General Ontology Level*

The objective of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) is to understand the social practices carried out in both time and space as an articulation between the action of individuals and the reproduction of social structures. The 'structural' aspect is conceived as a set of rules (normative elements and codes of signification) and resources (resources of authority, which derive from the coordination of the activity of human actors and the allocation of resources that come from the control of material objects or aspects of the material world) recursively engaged in the reproduction of social structures. Three dimensions of structures, rules and resources are identified—namely, signification (rules as a scheme of interpretation), legitimation (norms sanctioning practices) and domination (resources of allocation and authority facilitating the exercise of power). This structure only exists when it is updated in the practices that constitute the systems.

Giddens (1984) emphasises the fundamental interconnections between the structures of signification, legitimation and domination, presenting them as intrinsically linked elements. However, he argues that, while interdependent, these structures can be separated for analytical purposes (Sarason et al., 2020). Indeed, while social systems consistently incorporate all three types of structures, it is possible that one particular type may be more salient in a given context (Giddens, 1976). This interdependence can be conceptualised through the analogy of interlocking gears, where when one gear moves, all the others follow, although one may stand out due to its size, symbolising its dominance within the system (Sarason et al., 2020) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1- Interlocking social structures (inspired by Sarason et al., 2020)



Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) is based on the concept of duality, which emphasises that the constituents of actors and structures are not two independent phenomena. Duality indicates that social structures are constituted by human action and the medium of that human action. At the same time, social structures are the means and the result of the action of the actors. Hence, they define both the rules—technical, standards or procedures—guiding the action and the resources allowing it.

In response to the call by Sarason and Conger (2018) for entrepreneurship researchers to acknowledge the multi-paradigmatic perspective and confront the multiple paradigms and inherent tensions when studying the link between the individual and entrepreneurial opportunity—rather than to ignore or avoid addressing them—we argue that the mobilisation of structuration theory offers a viable response to the related challenge. The choice of paradigm to adopt when utilising this theory remains a subject of debate, as highlighted by the discourse between Mole and Mole (2010) and Sarason et al. (2006, 2010). Critical realism, as advocated by scholars such as Bhaskar (1986) and Archer (1995), posits that knowledge is socially constructed but remains distinct from actual entities. This paradigm has human agency at its core, asserting that individuals interact with an external ‘reality’ that can both constrain and enable their actions. This provides a framework for understanding how social actors create systems while simultaneously being shaped by those structures. Structuration theory, as developed by Giddens (1984), aptly illustrates this concept by demonstrating that individuals are both empowered and constrained by social structures.

In the field of entrepreneurship, structuration theory opens up new avenues for studying the nexus of individuals and opportunities (Chiasson & Saunders, 2005; Sarason et al., 2006). Yet this theory has been the subject of several criticisms in the literature. For instance, it is considered to be highly philosophical (Bauman, 1989). In developing structuration theory, Barley and Tolbert (1997) propose a diachronic approach to structural change. They specify that structures do not exist separately from practice, meaning that individuals cannot be specified outside of a social context. These authors use the notion of scripts to conceptualise the nexus of agency and structure at the empirical level, while at the methodological level, an analytical distinction between actors’ actions and structures can be made through sequential analysis of the structuration process (Barley & Tolbert, 1997).

### *2.3. Scripts and Entrepreneurial Opportunity*

Barley (1989) explores scripts at the intersection of psychology and sociology, assigning to them a mediating role between human agency and social structure. Originating from the cognitive sciences, scripts are sets of knowledge organised around events, facilitating the transition from meaning to action, as Schank and Abelson (1977) note. In the organisational context, Barley (1989) defines them as recurring interactions that stabilise actors’ roles. He, along with Barley and

Tolbert (1997), also regards scripts as observable behavioural regularities, serving as cognitive frameworks, legitimacy models and sources of resources. Duberley et al. (2006) adopt the same definition, viewing scripts as interpretive frameworks arising from interactions that represent the fundamental assumptions guiding individuals' understandings and actions. Furthermore, Gioia and Poole (1984) utilise the concept of 'script' to capture the cognitive dynamics underpinning organisational behaviours and understand how individuals act within organisations. Thus, the concept of script lies at the crossroads of psychology (Schank & Abelson, 1977) and sociology (Goffman, 1959), holding significant interest in the study of organisational behaviours (Gioia & Poole, 1984).

The evaluation of a particular script can be performed according to the criteria of signification, legitimation and domination (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). In evaluating scripts, actors analyse these three dimensions within a particular structural framework. Scripts are deemed legitimate when they are considered to be morally and practically acceptable (Chiasson & Saunders, 2005). For instance, in the field of social entrepreneurship, crowdfunding campaigns have become a legitimate script, given that they enable resource mobilisation in alignment with investors' expectations concerning solidarity and transparency. However, the legitimacy of such a practice can always be called into question, especially if the results do not meet the standards of transparency and viability. Scripts are significant when they allow users to act quickly within a specific economic and social setting in order to achieve legitimate, competent and powerful results (Chiasson & Saunders, 2005). By following a script, a user develops and reinforces the cognitive processes and interpretive frameworks that facilitate action and decision-making. For example, when launching a new venture, entrepreneurs often follow scripts to attract potential investors, using standardised pitches and narrative frameworks recognised as effective within the startup ecosystem. A script is powerful if it enables its user to dominate the social and material resources (Chiasson & Saunders, 2005). For instance, in the innovation sector, strong relationships with business incubators or accelerators provide entrepreneurs with a powerful script, which grants them access to critical resources such as mentors, workspaces and funding.

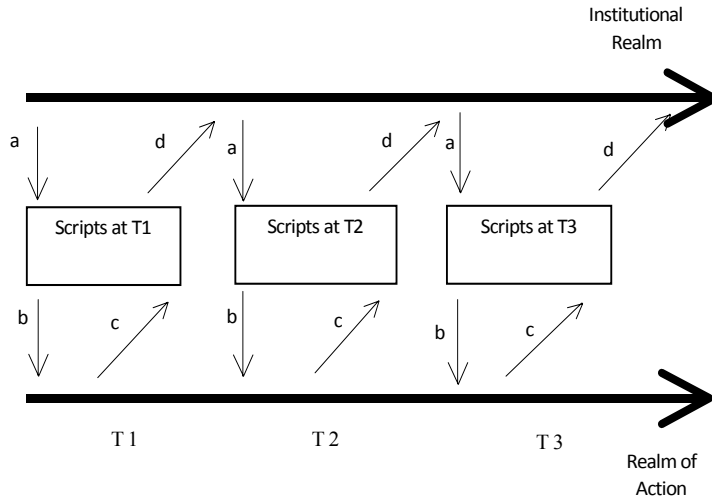
Scripts can be identified empirically, as Barley (1986) shows in his research on scanners. Human actions are guided by scripts reproduced within the framework of structures. Indeed, scripts are recipes borrowed, applied, modified and readjusted by individuals. A script can be reproduced or modified via intentional or unintentional action. Unintentional production of a script can occur simply because human activities must recur daily, while a script can also be modified due to unforeseen changes (Barley, 1986).

According to Barley and Tolbert (1997), structure presents an existing framework of rules drawn from the history of actions and interactions. The structure encoded in actors' actions and their practical knowledge influences their

communication, power, reward and sanctioning behaviours. Most studies on the relationship between action and structure focus on the process by which existing structures are maintained and modified. Research on this process requires a conceptual framework that defines the relationship between the phases of interaction and the institutional principles over time.

Barley and Tolbert (1997) propose a sequential model of the structuration process to reduce the analytical difficulty of distinguishing between action and structure. This model reflects the assertion that structuration is a continuous process whose evolution can only be understood over time. The horizontal arrows in bold in Figure 2 define the time extensions of the two domains of structure and action, while the vertical and diagonal arrows reflect duality. More specifically, the vertical arrows represent the structural constraints on the share, whereas the diagonal arrows reflect the maintenance or modification of the structure during the action.

Figure 2- Sequential process of structuration (Barley & Tolbert, 1997, p. 101)



The first moment of structuration (arrow a) is based on encoding the structural principles contained in the scripts used in specific contexts. This encoding often occurs in the socialisation phase and involves an individual internalisation of rules and an interpretation into appropriate behaviours in specific contexts (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). The second moment of structuration (arrow b) occurs when actors put the scripts that encode the structural principles into action. Here, actors are not always aware of their choices or possible alternatives. In some cases, this act is not intentional, as actors react according to their perceptions of the choruses (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). The third moment of structuration (arrow c) highlights the behaviours that review or replicate scripts. Technological changes, the use of other cultures, economic crises or other similar events increase the chances that actors will realise they can change their structure

(Barley & Tolbert, 1997). The fourth moment (arrow d) reflects the externalisation of the behaviours and interactions reproduced during the analysis. This operation involves dissociating the patterns of the behaviours of particular actors from the circumstances of specific histories. These schemes acquire both normative and factual qualities. The analysis by Barley and Tolbert (1997) implies an interest in the structures that facilitate or constrain the actor's action and how the latter actively mobilises these structures in action. The sequential structuration process generally focuses on the relationships between structures, agencies, scripts and their results.

Chiasson and Saunders (2005) mobilise the sequential process of structuration (Barley & Tolbert, 1997) to analyse the nexus of individuals and opportunities. According to these authors, successful entrepreneurial actions begin with script selection, reproduction and modification. This structure allows for the use of scripts of legitimation, signification and domination. The challenge for entrepreneurs is to differentiate themselves from the common scripts by producing unusual ones (Chiasson & Saunders, 2005). Indeed, an entrepreneur's previous skills and experiences are essential for the development of new scripts. To achieve this goal, the entrepreneur chooses from a range of common scripts recognised as being largely legitimate and competent and unusual scripts that may be considered legitimate, competent and powerful in the future.

Paradoxically, Chiasson and Saunders (2005) do not report any empirical results. Therefore, their proposals remain theoretical and do not concretely explain the articulation and interaction between entrepreneurs, opportunities and scripts. In other words, Chiasson and Saunders (2005) rely on Barley and Tolbert's (1997) model to provide empirical and concrete answers to overcome the limits of structuration theory, a very abstract theory that generates few empirical studies, ultimately suggesting only the theoretical propositions cited above. To take this further, we extend the proposals of Chiasson and Saunders (2005) and explore the idea that Barley and Tolbert's (1997) model makes it possible to move from a general ontology to an *in situ* ontology, whereby we can concretely understand how the entrepreneur can select, reproduce or modify scripts to imagine an opportunity.

### 3. Research Methodology

We opted to perform an in-depth study of several cases, which increased the variety of situations studied. In the following subsections, we present our approach to the empirical investigation and the cases studied in this research.

#### 3.1. Multiple Case Studies

Our goal was to understand the nexus between individuals and entrepreneurial opportunities. To accomplish this, we chose a multiple case study approach to

conduct this study. In this regard, a multiple case study approach allows the understanding and modelling of the dynamic process of a studied phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2014). As a result, the use of multiple case studies was perfectly suited to addressing our problem.

Proponents of the case study method propose different typologies to highlight the characteristics of the cases to be studied. It is difficult to position case studies within a given typology, as case studies generally straddle several overlapping justifications and categories (Stake, 2008). From this perspective, based on the typologies proposed by Stake (2008) and Yin (2014), the cases studied in this research are considered instrumental because they make it possible to test a previously formulated theory—that is, the sequential process of structuration and the notion of the script—in order to understand and analyse this nexus. However, they are also critical cases (Yin, 2014) because our objective is to question the opposition between the discovery and creation approaches. Finally, five cases were selected (see Table 2), where the included entrepreneurs constituted a varied sample, allowing a comparison between cases.

The choice of cases studied was based on the intention to include the maximum diversity of profiles. Hence, our sample included different categories of entrepreneurs: woman, senior, youth and immigrant. This was a deliberate choice aimed at gaining varied perspectives from the field, thereby ensuring that our analysis would not be limited to a single profile. This diversity in the sample allowed us to deepen our understanding of entrepreneurial dynamics by considering the range of experiences, motivations and challenges unique to each group.

We conducted two to three semi-structured biographical interviews with each entrepreneur to collect the required data. These interviews allowed us to understand how the entrepreneurs live their experiences and access their feelings and stories. Here, the biographical approach can be defined as the analysis of a narrative by an actor based on the events he or she has experienced (Pailot, 2003). It provides rich perspectives for understanding entrepreneurial dynamics (Filion & Akizawa, 2012). In this regard, Pailot (2003) notes that, in the field of entrepreneurship, the biographical method makes it possible to identify the influence of certain elements from the life histories of entrepreneurs on the construction of their engagement in a project, on the existence of certain entrepreneurial dispositions and on the reasons why they are actualised in a privileged way in the formation of entrepreneurial interest. The collection of life stories allows researchers not only to communicate factual information about the events that marked the biographical journey of entrepreneurs but also to highlight the major events that have had a strong impact on them. Thus, it opens up a space that allows for a precise and reliable description of the sequences of situations, interactions and actions through complex dialogical creation. This corresponds to both our problem and our research question.

Table 2- Synthesis of the five life stories

	<b>Case 1: CROQ</b>	<b>Case 2: FRANCI</b>	<b>Case 3: PLATE</b>	<b>Case 4: VISUPRET</b>	<b>Case 5: POTA</b>
Date and Duration of Interviews	January 2016 (45 minutes) March 2016 (1h30) June 2016 (1h)	January 2016 (1h) March 2016 (1h15)	January 2016 (45 mn) March 2016 (1h15) April 2017 (45 mn)	January 2016 (1h15) March 2016 (1h)	January 2016 (1h) March 2016 (1h15) April 2017 (45 mn)
Company activity	A mono-product restaurant with the aim of making it a chain.	A cutting company and trade in semi-wholesale and details in the butchery.	Create a platform to promote the mutual aid of populations in difficulty by providing them with a virtual meeting space.	A visual database of products sold on the internet.	A range, made in France, of Halal meals for babies.
Date of creation	2016	2016	2017	2016	2017

The objective of the interviews was to understand and analyse the structures and scripts used by the entrepreneurs during the process of imagining opportunities. The interviewees were always invited to discuss the context of creation (family, economic, socio-political and competitive), their personal stories and their actions.

### *3.2. Data Collection and Transcription*

For the collection of the life stories, we conducted two to three semi-structured interviews with each entrepreneur (see Table 3), leading to two to three hours of interviews per entrepreneur.

Table 3- Presentation of the cases studied

	<b>Approach to discovery</b>	<b>Approach to creation</b>	<b>Our positioning</b>
Opportunity	Objective	Subjective	Selection, production and modification of scripts of signification, legitimation and domination
Nexus	Dualism	Duality	Duality (general ontology) Dualism (in-situ ontology)
The researcher's level of observation	From bottom to top (from micro level to macro level)	From top to bottom (from macro level to micro level)	Meso level

The interviews began with closed-ended questions concerning each entrepreneur's age, experience, academic background, family situation and business activities. We then asked them open-ended questions. In particular, we asked the entrepreneurs to talk about their external environments, networks, general dispositions, cultures, values, skills, and actions, as well as the results of their actions. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

To ensure that ethical and integrity-related standards were maintained during the interviews, we obtained informed consent from each entrepreneur after clearly articulating the study's objectives and the intended use of the collected data. We also ensured confidentiality by anonymising the information and securing the recordings. To protect the identities of the interviewees, a pseudonym was assigned to each entrepreneur. The interviews were conducted with a high degree of sensitivity, allowing the entrepreneurs to express themselves freely. The data were transcribed meticulously, and the interviewees were given the opportunity to review the transcriptions to verify the accuracy of the information and consent to the use of their statements.

### *3.3. Data Coding and Analysis*

The order of the analysis phases in the sequential structuring process is sufficiently flexible to adapt to the nature of the research question at hand (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). Thus, our research began with an analysis of the context (social structures), before examining the strategic actions of entrepreneurs. This reorganisation of the order, placing the context analysis first, does not imply neglect of the actions of entrepreneurs. On the contrary, by analysing the structural context of the entrepreneurs, this research relies on their knowledge to interpret their understanding of their environment.

To carry out this process, we applied the model of Corley and Gioia (2004), which consists of three main levels of analysis—that is, first-order concepts, second-order concepts and aggregated dimensions. Although the presentation of the coding process is linear, we emphasise that the process was, in reality, much more dynamic and iterative (Crosina & Pratt, 2019). We explored both the data and the theory through a structured approach aimed at ensuring clarity and rigor (Gioia et al., 2013). Moreover, we examined the issue of meaning-making and identified analytical categories to develop an understanding of the imagining of an entrepreneurial opportunity within a dynamic framework of structure–agency–scripts. The analysis of the interviews occurred simultaneously to the structuring of the theoretical section, allowing for iteration between the theoretical and empirical levels (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The first author conducted the initial coding and analysis. All of the authors then participated in discussions to revise and refine the emerging themes, categories and results, thus facilitating the theorisation process.

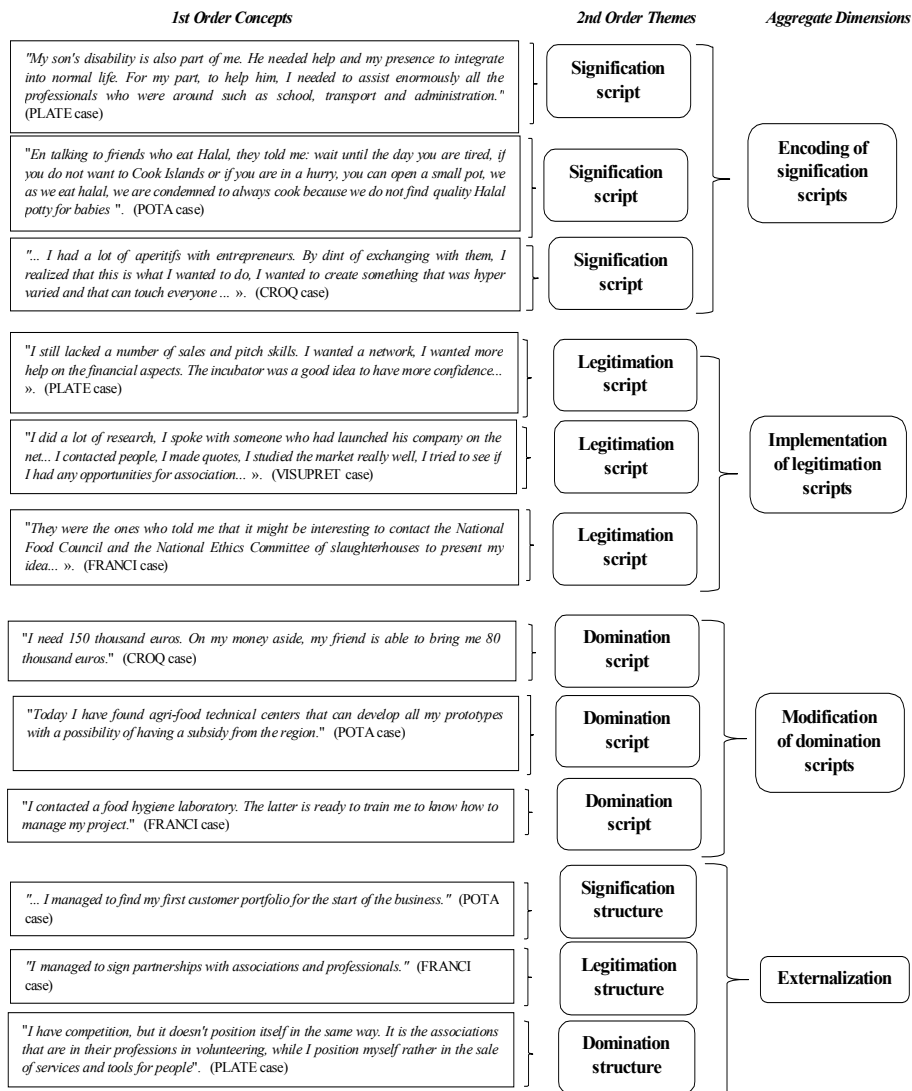
The first level of analysis did not require a deep theoretical understanding of the studied phenomenon (Corley & Gioia, 2004). For all of the interviews, we

used an open coding system to identify how the interviewed entrepreneurs acted and reacted to imagine an opportunity. This first level of coding allowed us to identify the profiles and actions of the entrepreneurs, in addition to the social structures directly involved in or affected by their actions. To preserve the entrepreneurs' voices, we used their own terms to code the data (Locke, 2001). While we observed differences in the profiles of the entrepreneurs, we noted significant homogeneity in the mobilisation of different scripts and the social structures that dominate each script.

We qualitatively and inductively analysed our data to develop first- and second-order themes (Miles et al., 2014), working iteratively between the data and the theory to explain the relationships between the categories and structure our presentation (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 2007). In this sense, the second-order analysis related to the development of new relationships that allowed for a deeper theoretical understanding. We used axial coding to group similar first-order codes into more aggregated second-order themes. This abstraction process allowed us to shift from the entrepreneurs' voices to a more theoretical language. For example, we grouped various first-order codes related to the interpretation of structural evolutions and contradictions within the contexts of the different entrepreneurs (see Figure 3) under the theme of meaning scripts. Here, the first-order codes related to incubators, family background, suppliers, consulting firms and the Paris-Île-de-France region were grouped under the theme of legitimacy scripts. We categorised the first-order codes related to financial and non-financial resources (e.g. human capital and knowledge specifically linked to the production of new products and services) under the theme of domination scripts. Similar groupings were performed to identify the impact of the entrepreneurs' actions on the three types of structures in terms of meaning, legitimacy and domination.

In the final coding phase, we examined how the second-order themes combined into aggregated dimensions to form a coherent theoretical narrative (Corley & Gioia, 2004). Thus, we combined the different meaning scripts under the dimension encoding of signification scripts, the different legitimacy scripts under the dimension implementation of legitimisation scripts, the different domination scripts under the dimension modification of domination scripts and the different types of structures identified under the dimension externalisation. Finally, we discussed how these theoretical dimensions formed a coherent story of the analysed data, resolving any theoretical differences within the author team and advancing theorisation (Castelló et al., 2023). Ultimately, we established a framework that accurately represents the form and essence of the studied phenomena and extends existing theories to entrepreneurship. We present the structure of our data in Figure 3.

Figure 3- Data structure



#### 4. Findings: The Sequential Process of Structuration in Practice

Our results show that entrepreneurs create new beliefs both exogenously and endogenously. Signification scripts influence how entrepreneurs perceive their context in order to facilitate the creation of new beliefs. By relying on legitimation scripts, entrepreneurs believe that they understand how their environment works, allowing them to imagine opportunities. Entrepreneurs then

mobilise resources to realise and exploit opportunities guided by dominance scripts.

#### *4.1. Encoding Signification Scripts*

The first issue is what makes an individual interpret what happens in their context as an opportunity to start a new business. Our results emphasise that the starting point refers to the encoding of signification scripts, which facilitate the imagining of opportunity by allowing entrepreneurs to become attentive to new information and external contexts. More specifically, entrepreneurs use signification scripts to observe the environment, communicate with others and imagine the processes for interpreting their contexts. Thus, information serves as the raw material with which entrepreneurs reflect and imagine new opportunities. Through imagination, entrepreneurs open up virtual labs where they can develop and test new ideas and design new markets, products and services.

**FRANCI**, while talking with his friend (a butcher), received the information that there were no self-service butchers. This entrepreneur interpreted the lack of such a service and the accelerated pace of life when it comes to shopping as an opportunity to create a chain of cutting, semi-wholesale and retail businesses in terms of self-service butchers.

Through caring for her disabled son, **PLATE** acquired experience (signification script) of administration, transport, education and school. She then found herself coaching people (signification script) with the same problem, even accompanying them in particular situations. Based on these scripts, **PLATE** interpreted the structural contradictions between the development of computer tools in society and people in difficult situations who do not have access to certain administrative information as an opportunity to create a platform that promotes mutual assistance in situations of difficulty due to disability, chronic illness or learning difficulties by providing them with a virtual meeting space.

**CROQ**'s personal story allowed for the imagining of opportunity. He began to cook based on the landmarks he experienced in childhood. He learned to cook his mother's and grandmother's croque monsieurs. Gradually, he began to change the croque monsieurs. He changed the cheese, bread and everything he put inside. By exchanging and going out with friends of friends (signification script), he noticed an evolution in the level of traditional dish consumption. He interpreted this structural evolution as an opportunity to create a single-product restaurant (croque monsieur) and then make it a chain.

While shopping on the internet (signification script) as a young mother, **VISUPRET** found that there were visual elements missing from websites. She interpreted the structural contradictions between the need to buy on the internet on the part of many young mothers and the poor quality of the photos on websites as an opportunity to create a visual database of products sold via the internet.

A similar situation was observed for **POTA**. As a young mother halfway through her professional career, she felt that the prepared meals sold for babies

were not satisfactory. Chatting with friends who followed a halal diet, she found that there were no halal food jars for babies (signification script). She interpreted this situation as an opportunity to create a range of halal meals for babies made in France.

The cases studied indicate that structural evolutions or contradictions can be sources of opportunity. The encoding of unusual signification scripts is based on the internalisation of these structural contradictions and evolutions, allowing the first phase of the imagining of an opportunity. Signification scripts allow entrepreneurs to perceive existing information and interpret structural evolutions and contradictions. Moreover, signification scripts develop to enhance entrepreneurs' imagined efforts to acquire specific creative thinking.

#### *4.2. Implementation of Legitimation Scripts*

Our results highlight that the new idea of opportunity remains internalised in the minds of entrepreneurs and may have little in common with the field or market of opportunity. Hence, the second issue is how these entrepreneurs came up with opportunities based on encoded signification scripts. At this stage, the actions taken by the various entrepreneurs to give a legitimate character to the opportunity in question are based on the implementation of legitimation scripts. This implementation represents the second phase of the process of imagining an opportunity.

If an opportunity can be imagined and created, then it must be legitimate. From this perspective, legitimation scripts allow entrepreneurs to make sense of structural contradictions (sources of opportunity). Entrepreneurs are guided by these interpretations of the encoded signification scripts. They respond to the encoded scripts by combining the opinions of other actors and necessary information via the implementation of legitimation scripts. In this way, the mobilisation of legitimation scripts allows entrepreneurs to find additional evidence to improve and legitimise their initial ideas. Entrepreneurs then demonstrate that these opportunities create value through business creation.

Examples of the legitimation scripts used by the interviewed entrepreneurs include business planning, which represents an important legitimation script whereby entrepreneurs interact with important stakeholders. For example, **PLATE** relied on an incubator to present her project and overcome moments of uncertainty. **CROQ** favoured using his family connections to acquire more legitimacy for his idea. **VISUPRET** contacted suppliers and information technology (IT) specialists to present her project and overcome moments of uncertainty. She exchanged with several actors to develop the operational plans.

Among the legitimation scripts, we can also mention the study and analysis of potential markets. **FRANCI** contacted a consulting firm to validate his business creation project. **POTA** developed legitimation scripts through participation in food innovation competitions in the Paris-Ile de France region

and the selection of innovations for the International Food Show held at the Parc des Expositions de Villepinte.

Our results made it possible to identify distinct and complementary legitimisation scripts. These scripts allowed the entrepreneurs to capture important information about the effectiveness of their products and services and to externalise different ideas for opportunities.

#### *4.3. Modifying Domination Scripts*

Our results highlight how entrepreneurs typically face problems related to a lack of power vis-à-vis stakeholders, which results in the usual scripts. Our results also show that entrepreneurs use dominance scripts to acquire and pool the resources needed to turn their ideas into reality and turn both individual and usual scripts into a new opportunity. Typically, the resources entrepreneurs need are in the hands of more powerful actors, who might not be willing to support start-ups.

The interviewed entrepreneurs mobilised several dominant scripts to find sources of financing. For example, **CROQ** sought to secure the necessary funding from his friends. The entrepreneurs also appealed to regional authorities. Indeed, **POTA** managed to obtain funding through this approach.

Our results highlight how entrepreneurs make greater use of dominant scripts to acquire other (non-financial) resources, including human capital and knowledge specifically related to the production of new products and services. **PLATE** and **VISUPRET** both contacted computer engineers to help them to develop the technical aspects of their projects and build their websites. To acquire the necessary knowledge in the field of butchery, **FRANCI** looked for specialised structures to help him.

#### *4.4. Externalisation*

Externalisation often results in the recognition of opportunities by stakeholders. In other words, this particular moment in the sequential process of structuration translated into the existence of new companies within the market in the studied cases. These results are based on the mobilisation of the three dimensions of the structure. The signification translates into the clients who use the services provided, representing new actors in the economic and social development of the country, as in the case of **POTA**. Legitimation is linked to the recognition of a company by customers, suppliers and partners. As **FRANCI** noted, ‘I managed to sign partnerships with associations and professionals’. Dominance is linked to the recognition of a new company as a competitor, which **PLATE** described as follows: ‘I have competition, but it doesn’t position itself in the same way. These are the associations that are in their jobs in volunteering, while I position myself rather in the sale of services and tools to people’.

## 5. Discussion

In this section, we will discuss our results in light of the debate between the discovery and creation approaches, drawing on the three considerations identified in the literature review (see Table 1).

### 5.1. Nature of Opportunity

Our analysis reveals that the sequential process of structuration presents both methodological and analytical concepts that can overcome the ontological debate between the discovery and creation approaches. Thus, the sequential structuration process offers researchers an operational theory that can shape and guide empirical research to understand how structures, entrepreneurs and scripts interact. In this sense, the ideas of Chiasson and Saunders (2005) are a starting point for understanding the nexus between individuals and opportunities.

Indeed, in line with Chiasson and Saunders (2005), we find that successful entrepreneurial action begins with the selection, production and modification of scripts. However, these authors do not concretely explain how entrepreneurs can select, reproduce or modify scripts in order to imagine an opportunity. To address this issue, we highlight how different scripts help to define how entrepreneurs act and interact so that they can both understand and interpret market needs and develop the means to meet those needs.

According to Giddens' (1984) analysis, our findings reveal that different types of structures may dominate within each script, although the three types of structures—that is, signification, legitimation and domination—remain constantly present and interlinked in each type. We posit that the predominance of a particular structure depends on the specific context (see Figure 3). By identifying the dominant structure within a given script, an entrepreneur can mobilise this structure to direct their thinking and actions towards imagining an opportunity.

This research highlights the process whereby an entrepreneur engages various scripts of signification, legitimation and domination to organise their thoughts and actions towards imagining an opportunity. Below, we outline each type of script mobilised, specifying the conditions in which one structure proves dominant.

#### 5.1.1. Signification Scripts

Our results demonstrate that, through their skills and experiences, entrepreneurs use signification scripts that allow them to more effectively imagine new opportunities. Experienced entrepreneurs (**FRANCI**, **PLATE** and **POTA**) tend to have a broader and more complex range of signification scripts than entrepreneurs who do not have such experience (**VISUPRET** and **CROQ**) in the field of opportunity activities (Pryor et al., 2016). In addition, experienced entrepreneurs may use scripts in different ways when compared with entrepreneurs who lack experience (Baron, 2006). Therefore, entrepreneurs who

possess more sophisticated signification scripts, largely due to their experiences, may request necessary information that is not usually available in the media or among other individuals. In this way, entrepreneurs can communicate with other actors to create new ideas and imagine new opportunities.

The principle of duality (Giddens, 1984) makes it possible to understand how entrepreneurs mobilise these signification scripts and, at the same time, how signification scripts lead entrepreneurs to ask questions and find answers. In other words, when it comes to interpreting structural evolutions and contradictions, entrepreneurs with more advanced signification scripts ask questions that other individuals do not know the answers to. In so doing, these entrepreneurs focus on the structural evolutions and contradictions that may serve as sources for imagining new opportunities. Indeed, the studied cases show us that, while the binding nature of structures is often stressed in the literature, structural evolutions and contradictions can be sources of opportunity.

#### *5.1.2. Legitimation Scripts*

Our results highlight how the mobilisation of legitimation scripts can lead entrepreneurs to conduct broader market research in order to gain a more detailed understanding of the needs of both customers and stakeholders. To understand their environments, entrepreneurs look for information about the presence of a market, access to financing, availability of raw materials, dynamism of relevant technologies, presence of existing or future competitors and other factors that influence their ability to create market value.

We observe various relevant legitimation scripts. For some entrepreneurs, legitimation scripts can guide them to favour family and friends when seeking to legitimise their new ideas for the opportunity. Such interactions provide a comfortable setting for entrepreneurs, who use these trusting relationships to acquire legitimacy before confronting real customers and market conditions (Pryor et al., 2016). Based on their experiences, other entrepreneurs have access to more legitimation scripts, which allow them to see that interpretations by family and friends can provide a potentially biased and incomplete market assessment (Hite & Hesterly, 2001). Our results made it possible to identify distinct but complementary legitimation scripts.

#### *5.1.3. Domination Scripts*

Our findings also highlight how entrepreneurs use domination scripts to acquire necessary resources and support from their company's stakeholders. These domination scripts guide the acquisition, grouping and exploitation of entrepreneurs' resources to organise their initial ideas. The behaviours that emerge from the dominant scripts of entrepreneurs lead to ambitious results (new products being developed, sales, growth, customer satisfaction) to the extent that these results strengthen the imagining of new opportunities by modifying the usual and individual scripts.

Contrary to the analyses by Chiasson and Saunders (2005), we emphasise that separate scripts of signification, legitimation and domination are not enough to imagine an opportunity. The iteration or combination of these scripts makes it possible to produce new scripts that, in turn, make it possible to imagine an opportunity. By so doing, entrepreneurs can reproduce the same scripts and complete their projects. Therefore, our results suggest that combining the three types of scripts indicates an optimal level to balance the imagining of a new opportunity. Thus, to conceptualise the nexus of individuals and opportunities, we emphasise that analysing the three types of scripts and how those scripts facilitate or constrain the imagining of new opportunities is necessary.

### *5.2. Nexus between Entrepreneurs and Opportunities*

The starting point for our analysis was the concept of duality. Indeed, at the general ontology level, structuration theory considers structural evolutions and contradictions to be memory traces in the actor's memory (Giddens, 1984). In this sense, the imagining of opportunity is more internal than external to the actor. This internal character of structural evolutions and contradictions prevents the idea of dualism. However, the concept of duality appears to be limited to understanding the nexus of individuals and entrepreneurial opportunities (Ghamgui & Soparnot, 2020).

All of the studied entrepreneurs adopted a certain distance from the rules and considered them to be social objects. Hence, we find that, in highly differentiated social environments, entrepreneurs maintain a critical distance from structural evolutions and contradictions in order to question them and develop or define strategies to transform them using different scripts. According to both Mouzelis (1989, 1995) and Archer (1995), this distance from structural evolutions and contradictions translates into dualism.

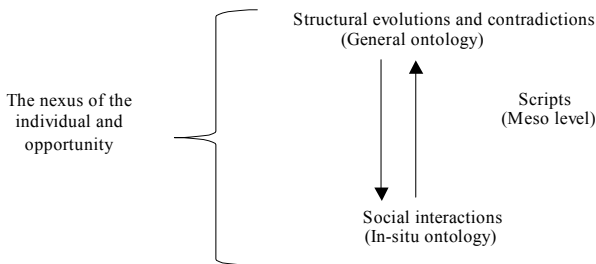
Our analyses suggest that, at the in situ ontology level, the duality concept does not appear sufficient to explain the relationship between agency and structure because it does not consider the distance maintained by entrepreneurs from social structures. Therefore, we propose considering the notion of dualism to complete the notion of duality when analysing the nexus of individuals and entrepreneurial opportunities (Ghamgui & Soparnot, 2022). We take duality as a starting point, as suggested by Giddens (1984), for whom the structure consists of a set of virtual rules and resources that are outside both time and space. Therefore, this definition concerns the level of general ontology. At the same time, building on the case studies' results, we highlight how the entrepreneurs form part of a social system and a set of interactions with other stakeholders. This system and the related interactions evolve over time and space. This concerns the level of in situ ontology, which considers the complementarity between duality and dualism to understand the mobilisation of different scripts.

### 5.3. *The Researcher's Level of Observation*

The final point of opposition identified in the literature refers to the level of analysis and sense of observation of the researcher. This point emphasises that the researcher's level of observation and analysis reinforces the opposition between the discovery and creation approaches (Suddaby et al., 2015). Our study emphasises that these two approaches mutually support each other rather than opposing each other. In other words, the opposition highlighted in the literature between the two approaches is essentially the result of the positioning of researchers who form part of a dualistic perspective at the level of general ontology in order to observe the emergence of entrepreneurial opportunities (the separation between human agency and social structure).

While the opposition between the discovery and creation approaches has stimulated discussion of the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying entrepreneurship research, thereby generating productive debates, our findings suggest that an analytical clarification of the concepts of duality and dualism through the use of distinct scripts at the meso level can offer alternative perspectives for re-conceptualising the link between the individual and entrepreneurial opportunity. This approach establishes a bridge between the general ontology of structuration theory and in situ ontology, facilitating empirical studies based on this theory. In addition, the meso level allows the researcher to consider both levels of observation.

Figure 4– The nexus of the individual and opportunity: a reorganisation of the levels of analysis



## 6. Theoretical and Managerial Contributions

In this section, we present the theoretical and managerial contributions of our research.

### 6.1. *Theoretical Contributions*

Recent research supports the potential for a reconciliation between the discovery and creation approaches by illustrating the objective and subjective nature of opportunity (Chiasson & Saunders, 2005; Buenstorf, 2007; Casanova et al., 2019; Seyb et al., 2019; Ghamgui & Soparnot, 2022). Such a reconciliation would

address calls to resolve the conceptual fragmentation within the entrepreneurial opportunity paradigm (Williams & Wood, 2015). Our findings suggest that the imagining of an opportunity is an iterative process, whereby an entrepreneur’s socially constructed beliefs about an opportunity are continually tested and refined (Wood & McKinley, 2010), particularly through the mobilisation of various scripts.

Reconciling the discovery and creation perspectives would enhance our understanding of the relationship between the individual and the opportunity, although it may also attract criticism regarding the blurring of the distinct approaches. Importantly, this reconciliation does not imply the elimination of each perspective’s unique contributions; rather, it represents an effort to articulate each one’s nuances. This approach offers a broader, more dynamic view of the relationship between them, avoiding theoretical oversimplification. Such an inclusive process requires researchers to broaden their insights across differing ontologies and adopt a mindset that is both critical and open (Sarason & Conger, 2018). However, this inclusivity does pose risks, given that it may be perceived to lack rigor or be overly diffuse (Shepherd, 2015).

We agree with Sarason et al. (2006) in viewing opportunities not as isolated phenomena but as idiosyncrasies of the individual within a duality framework. Nonetheless, our results reveal certain limitations in terms of the concept of duality, as defined by Giddens (1984). In some cases, entrepreneurs distance themselves from certain social structures, challenge them or establish strategies to maintain or transform them. Consequently, the concept of duality as it is currently conceptualised does not account for the methodological distance between the entrepreneur and the opportunity. This distance translates into an analytical dualism in the sense defined by Archer (1995).

Table 4 presents our perspective on overcoming the debate between the discovery and creation approaches through the notion of scripts.

Table 4- Overcoming the discovery *versus* creation debate

	Approach to discovery	Approach to creation
Opportunity	Objective	Subjective
Nexus	Dualism	Duality
<b>The researcher’s level of observation</b>	From bottom to top (from micro level to macro level)	From top to bottom (from macro level to micro level)

Reconciling the discovery and creation approaches in the ‘opportunity war’ can be seen as a quest for a ‘fragile peace’ between two opposing schools of thought. The related integration aims to bring the two perspectives together within a broader framework, albeit with certain challenges. Similar to two opposing parties in a conflict who reach a compromise without abandoning their

initial positions, merging these perspectives can offer a holistic view, although it remains vulnerable to criticism concerning dilution or lack of clarity. While this reconciliation may seem fragile or imperfect, it opens up new paths by integrating nuances from different approaches. Rather than rigid opposition, a nuanced peace enables progress towards a more complex and adaptable understanding of the individual–opportunity relationship, one that thrives on the tensions between creation and discovery. This nuanced peace advances the debate and enriches the field, avoiding a theoretical impasse that could both limit understanding and hinder progress.

Thus, the debate between the discovery and creation perspectives can be seen as a simplification of the underlying ontological issues. This debate has prompted in-depth academic discussions (Alvarez & Barney, 2010), but it has also cautioned against a narrow view of the richness of entrepreneurial research and the temptation to win a ‘paradigm war’ (Shepherd, 2015; Sarason & Conger, 2018). In the field of entrepreneurship, as highlighted by Sarason and Conger (2018), researchers acknowledge the differences between paradigms while proposing a meta-visual approach to the particular paradigm in which they operate. Researchers should view theory not as the quest for absolute truth but as the pursuit of completeness, thereby integrating diverse worldviews. In line with Sarason and Conger’s (2018) research, we propose that the best way forward is the adoption of an ontological and epistemological pluralism, where the goal is not to establish which approach best serves the field but to understand what each perspective can teach us. It is essential to emphasise here that ontology and epistemology are foundational paradigms that shape our perception of the world. For instance, the creation perspective relies on a social construction view, while the discovery perspective aligns with a post-positivist approach, which is consistent with paradigms outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994).

The metaphor of the elephant used by Gartner (2001), or the notion of multiple elephants explained by Sarason and Conger (2018), is an excellent starting point for reflecting on the various theoretical perspectives in relation to entrepreneurship. However, it raises the issue of the elephant’s fixed nature and how researchers might transcend such a view to incorporate dynamic and evolving perspectives on entrepreneurship, recognising that this view is shaped by the multiple, interplaying interactions of the different paradigms. Rather than upholding the fixed view, we propose a dynamic understanding that considers the different views not as absolute truths but as complementary elements of a complex phenomenon. Hence, we envision a dynamic understanding where the elephant is not a fixed object but a living and evolving system co-constructed by both researchers and real developments within the entrepreneurial field. In other words, far from being merely a multiplicity of theoretical perspectives or separate lenses, the elephant is a constantly transforming entity, which reacts to interactions among different theories and practical developments in the entrepreneurial world.

## *6.2. Managerial Implications*

The managerial contributions of our study concern entrepreneurial support practices. Indeed, the mobilisation of the sequential process of structuration allows a detailed assessment of the behaviours of entrepreneurs and their interactions with stakeholders while imagining an opportunity. Consequently, this mobilisation presents a managerial contribution to the organisations providing entrepreneurs with support because it focuses on the specific needs of each entrepreneur.

The majority of the studied entrepreneurs repeatedly highlighted the difficulty of securing financing. Therefore, finding ways to overcome the lack of financing mechanisms is important and legitimate. Certainly, relevant devices have been put in place, but they do not seem sufficient for many entrepreneurs. In fact, our research highlights that the funding problem represents a complex and cross-cutting phenomenon. However, strengthening support mechanisms can facilitate access to financing, given that support structures can help entrepreneurs to better understand the expectations of their financial partners. In addition, these support organisations can play an interesting role in the intermediation between entrepreneurs and financing structures. Thus, the role of such support would have to evolve to focus on the scripts of legitimation and the domination of entrepreneurs. In this regard, support structures should strengthen entrepreneurs' legitimacy vis-à-vis stakeholders so that they can project themselves in different scenarios. This could be achieved by developing more partnerships between support structures and funding organisations.

In other words, it is necessary to help future entrepreneurs to design their scenarios based on new ideas of opportunities for realisation. The creation of a company is never the work of a single person. Hence, entrepreneurs should be able to make sense of opportunities for stakeholders. The different types of scripts studied in this research offer an example of a scenario that may be useful for future entrepreneurs and support organisations. These different scripts lead us to emphasise that the difficulties encountered by entrepreneurs are related to giving entrepreneurial opportunities legitimacy in order to secure the necessary financing and support for the implementation of solutions.

The role of the different studied scripts is to promote the ability of individuals to imagine actions, consequences and results in their environments. For this, it is necessary for a third party to project itself into a possible scenario. While this projection mechanism occurs naturally through signification scripts, the entrepreneur's ability to act is not always properly maintained.

We gathered data from five entrepreneurs using biographical interviews, which allowed us to obtain the detailed life story of each entrepreneur. The surveyed entrepreneurs constituted a varied sample in terms of their sectors of activity and profiles (immigrant, man, woman, young and senior). All of the entrepreneurs have succeeded in imagining and exploiting entrepreneurial

opportunities, which shows the impact of certain under-represented or disadvantaged social groups in the world of entrepreneurship. Fostering an entrepreneurial spirit within these groups and improving the quality of their entrepreneurial initiatives represents a means of generating employment and, above all, combating social exclusion (Billion et al., 2024).

## **7. Conclusion**

Through a qualitative study of multiple cases, we conducted research on the nexus between individuals and entrepreneurial opportunities. Our research focused on answering one central question: How does an entrepreneur select, reproduce or modify scripts to imagine an entrepreneurial opportunity?

We have highlighted the main areas of opposition between the discovery and creation approaches. One fundamental opposition entails the conceptualisation of the nexus of individuals and opportunities (dualism or duality). This key difference has led to other related problems, such as the researcher's sense of observation. However, despite these problems, based on Barley and Tolbert's (1997) model, we demonstrated that the nexus of individuals and opportunities is a process of selection, reproduction and modification of scripts of signification, legitimation and domination. Indeed, it emerged from our results that the nexus of entrepreneurs and opportunities is determined by the subjective nature of the entrepreneurs themselves as well as by the objective characteristics of the structural evolutions and contradictions with which they interact. This proves the relevance of the sequential process of structuration (Barley & Tolbert, 1997) to conducting studies on social phenomena at the level of in situ ontology.

The research strategy proposed by Barley and Tolbert (1997) guided the present data collection, which was carried out iteratively alongside a review of the literature in the field of entrepreneurship. In so doing, we responded to entrepreneurial theory (Suddaby et al., 2015) by proposing a theoretical framework that extends beyond the opposition between the discovery and creation approaches to understand the nexus between individuals and opportunities as a process of selection, reproduction and modification of scripts.

Still, there are some limitations to this research. First, the study sample is small and, therefore, it is difficult to generalise the results for all entrepreneurs, given the cultural and social differences in other regions and countries. Therefore, it would be interesting to analyse a greater number of cases. We invite other researchers to continue the empirical testing of structuration theory and Barley and Tolbert's (1997) model to improve our knowledge of the nexus between the individual and entrepreneurial opportunity.

The second limitation pertains to the various categories of entrepreneurs and the diversity of the entrepreneurial profiles. Indeed, employing a meta-theory such as structuration theory has enabled us to establish a general framework for

exploring the link between the individual and entrepreneurial opportunity. However, this approach may also have obscured the diversity of types of entrepreneurship. We deliberately chose to include multiple categories of entrepreneurs in our sample (women, seniors, mompreneurs, immigrants) in order to gather a range of perspectives. Nonetheless, our analysis does not explicitly address the issue of diversity, as the homogeneous feedback from the entrepreneurs did not prompt us to explore this subject in greater depth. Hence, we acknowledge that this reflection constitutes a limitation of our research. In future studies, it would be valuable to delve deeper into this dimension so as to enhance our understanding of the various categories of entrepreneurs within a framework that reconciles the discovery and creation approaches.

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