

**A DISCURSIVE APPROACH TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE EMERGENCE OF
ORGANIZATIONAL FIELDS**

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to explain how emerging organizational fields influence entrepreneurial agency and, conversely, how such agency shapes emerging fields during upswing, downturn and stabilization periods. Adopting a discursive perspective, we explicate how shared symbols provide entrepreneurs resources to formulate and legitimize heterogeneous visions during upswing periods. During downturns, shared symbols lose their appeal, becoming liabilities for entrepreneurs who had used them in their narratives. Fields stabilize when narratives of valid and desirable practices converge, delegitimizing divergent practices.

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FIGURE 1

A Stylized View of Discursive Dynamics in the Context of Emerging Fields

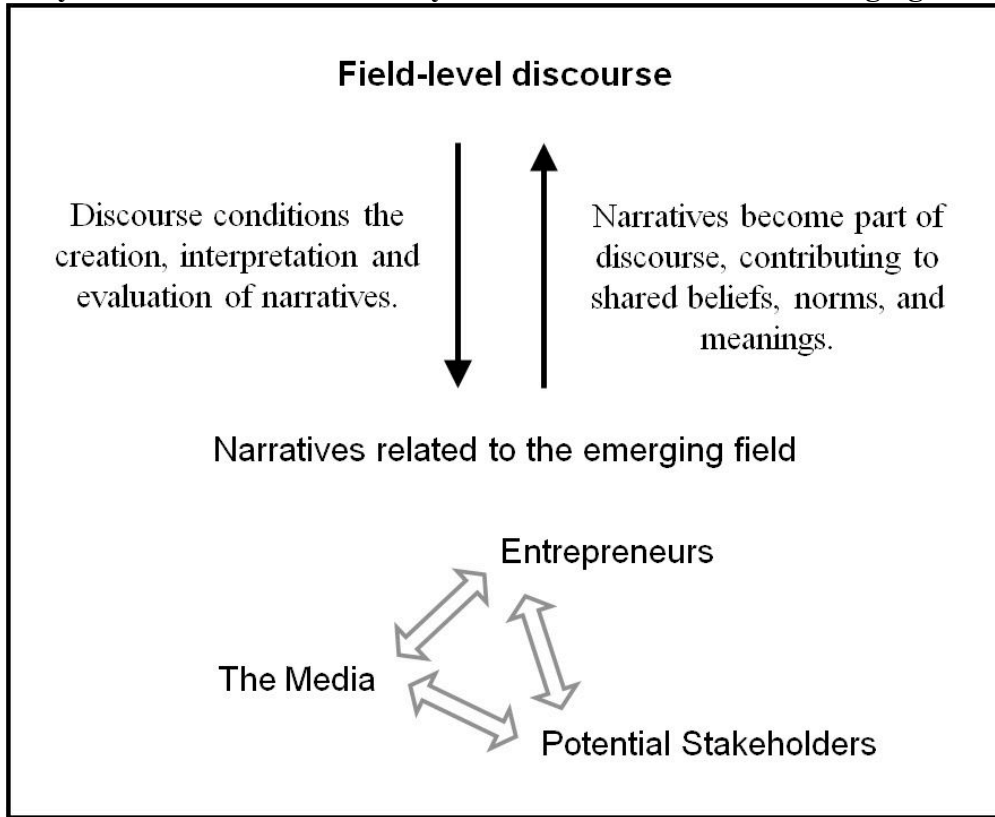


Table 1: Discursive Dynamics during Organizational Field Emergence

	Upswing	Downturn	Stabilization
Field-level discourse	Heterodox discourse populated by exciting new symbols and multiple claims that cannot be directly compared	Fragmented discourse populated by symbols that have lost legitimacy	Orthodox discourse populated by symbols that project measurable performance outcomes that can be directly compared
Field boundaries	Amorphous boundaries based on a set of shared symbols	Shrinking boundaries	Stabilized and consensual boundaries
Typical salient narratives	Expectations of an exciting future	Bleak future with regrets about the past	Here and now accounts
Power/Authority	Discourse empowers entrepreneurs as media amplifies promises of future performance	Discourse constrains entrepreneurs and empowers stakeholders as media amplifies accounts of failure	Discourse empowers organizations that conform as media reports demonstrable performance