Improvisation and Entrepreneurial Journalism: Reimagining Innovation

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ABSTRACT

With the rise of innovation and entrepreneurship as avenues for journalists to take in their search for journalistic work, we need to critically interrogate how these terms are understood. Various journalism institutions are pushing a particular understanding of journalism, and of what constitutes meaningful and innovative journalism. In this paper, we review the literature on these themes and draw on experimental research done by one of the authors to argue for a more process-oriented approach to journalistic innovation and entrepreneurship. As a researcher-maker, one of the authors created an innovative journalistic project and tried to develop a business model for this project. She participated in an accelerator process organised by one of the main funds aimed at journalism innovation in the Netherlands. We show that one existing, and prevalent, understanding of innovation in journalism is one that is linear, rational and outcome-oriented. We challenge this understanding and draw on process-oriented theories of innovation to introduce the concepts of effectuation, improvisation and becoming as new lenses to reconsider these phenomena. These concepts provide clearer insight into the passionate and improvisational nature of doing innovative journalistic work.

KEYWORDS

Journalism; entrepreneurship; innovation; teaching; improvisation; wayfinding

Introduction

In response to the many crises in journalism, terms such as “innovation” and “entrepreneurship” are gaining traction; both are promoted as fruitful avenues for (young) journalists seeking journalistic work (Singer 2018; Witschge and Harbers 2018; Cohen 2015; Schaich and Klein 2013; Deuze and Witschge 2020). Change is deemed necessary in the field, and entrepreneurship is deemed a portal to change (Deuze and Witschge 2020; Hepp and Loosen 2019). This is reflected in the growing number of journalism students educated in entrepreneurial thinking (Schaich and Klein 2013; Cohen 2015). The change can also be observed by looking at the field more generally; journalism is shaped by journalism funds, foundations, and others who provide entrepreneurship...
and innovation programmes such as accelerators and incubators. Viewed together, this educational and institutional impetus to innovate underlines a particular understanding of what is recognised as meaningful and innovative journalism.

In this paper, we review and reflect on prevalent ideas about entrepreneurship and innovation that are promoted in the field. We furthermore couple this reflection to experiences gathered while participating in an accelerator process, a short “sprint” programme for rethinking and testing an innovative idea and its business model, organised by one of the main funds aimed at journalism innovation in the Netherlands. We show that one of the understandings of entrepreneurship and innovation that exists in the field of journalism is one that is linear, rational, and outcome-oriented. This stands in stark contrast to more process-oriented theories of innovation that stem from fields outside of journalism studies. In order to theoretically and practically embrace the passionate and improvisational nature of doing innovative journalistic work, we break with these more linear conceptions of innovation to offer an alternative way of looking at the innovation process. We introduce the concepts of effectuation, improvisation and becoming as alternative lenses to reconsider these phenomena (Nayak and Chia 2011; Barrett 1998; Sarasvathy 2001). In doing so, we argue that this process-oriented approach reclaims the (becoming) journalist’s spontaneity from a predominantly top-down framing of innovation. A process-oriented approach therefore allows for a more bottom-up, experiential, understanding and analysis of journalistic innovation and entrepreneurship.

One of the first issues that we observe is how to define innovation within the field of journalism. We can broadly define innovation in journalism as the process of not just an “invention” of a new value for journalism, but also the process of implementing this new value in a market or a social setting to make it sustainable (Storsul and Krumsvik 2013). Specific to journalism, entrepreneurship “involves viewing problems as opportunities in need of a solution such as changing news consumption, digital content creation and engaging audiences” (Barnes and Scheepers 2018, 96). It is then important to note that, if we adopt a framework that is based on a traditional definition of journalism, we do not encounter innovative projects within the field, as these push the definitions from the margins of the field. In this article, we therefore adopt a bottom-up approach to what can be deemed to fall under the banner of “journalism.” This allows a focus on experiences that emerge in journalism as experienced by those practicing it. In doing so, draw on the experimental, enactive research done by Sofie Willemsen, who went through a process of bringing an innovative journalistic idea into the world.

Starting in 2016, Sofie set up her own innovative journalistic project which sought to broaden dominant contemporary conceptualisations of what journalism entails and counter traditional journalistic forms of representation. To provide embodied encounters between people from different countries, Sofie developed installations with screens, telephones, and webcams in public spaces across the world. There was, for example, a connection between a street in the United States and a university in the Netherlands during the 2016 American presidential election (see Figure 1). Through these installations, Sofie provided users with an interactive livestream to allow citizens from different countries to engage in dialogue. She reconceptualised her own role as a journalist to not be a storyteller, but a facilitator of conversations between citizens. The idea behind the project was to give users a curiosity-driven, experiential form of engaging with others on topics that were either socially or personally relevant.
Some might wonder whether this kind of installation-work can be considered journalism. This is exactly one of the questions Sofie wanted to address with her work. Deuze and Witschge (2020) underscore and challenge the strong normative conceptualisations of what is considered to be (proper) journalism. These normative conceptualisations limit the innovative potential of the field as a whole. In fact, innovators and entrepreneurs can be conceived of as pioneers who push our understanding of what can be considered journalism (Hepp and Loosen 2019). Sofie’s work was an experiment in proposing the value of facilitating dialogue as a new form of doing journalistic work, thereby moving away from traditional conceptualisations of journalists as watchdogs, gatekeepers, or agents that act as a control to power. Instead, the project allowed her as a journalist to be central a node between people in an exchange of meaningful experiential stories.

Facilitating these encounters was aimed at creating a sense of “authentic sharing,” where contributions are more unpolished and subjective, allowing people to put themselves in each other’s shoes. This is a value for journalistic work that has, for example, been advocated by Wahl-Jorgensen (2016) in her work on the central role emotion plays in journalism. What Wahl-Jorgensen (2016) suggests, is that the participation of “ordinary people” as citizen witnesses is not so much shaped by traditional news routines and values, but by lived experience in an embodied and personal fashion that is more emotional. This way of sharing has a sense of “authenticity,” where contributions are unpolished and subjective (Wahl-Jorgensen 2016). Although this is not the only value we propose journalistic work to have in the future, we acknowledge Sofie’s work as journalistically valid in line with these ideas of what journalism could be in a more participatory form.

After her own experiments with her journalistic idea, Sofie applied to and entered a journalism innovation grant process. It is this grant process that we here reflect on. In this paper, we first describe our research methodology used to research journalistic entrepreneurship. We then describe how journalism studies and education view entrepreneurship and discuss a specific innovation grant accelerator process as case study to reflect on the dominant views in journalistic perspectives on entrepreneurship. We hone in on two particular elements: its problem-based orientation and its insistence on critical testing of assumptions that underline the more product-oriented nature of the accelerator process. We then propose a process-oriented view of entrepreneurship, arguing that this better fits
the actual process of entrepreneurship than the perspective that seems to be the basis of the innovation grant, working from a fixed and rational view on entrepreneurship. From this alternative view on entrepreneurship, we then consider entrepreneurship as wayfinding process, putting forth a more intuitive, improvisational conceptualisation of entrepreneurship teaching.

**Methodology**

The grant Sofie applied for aims to support grant applicants in their innovation endeavours; the grant agency teaches journalistic applicants to adopt a business mindset by means of a coaching “pressure cooker” programme. Here, the applicants are meant to be taught how to further develop their innovative ideas and successfully introduce new forms of journalistic work. The programme is part of the “innovation fund” overseen by the Dutch Stimulation Fund for Journalism (Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek (SVDJ)). The final goal of the pressure cooker programme is to produce a business plan that serves as the basis of a grant application to be handed in to the board of the fund, which subsequently decides whether to provide a grant. The innovation grant therefore supports and stimulates the incubation phase, the phase in which new ideas are validated in the market (O’Reilly and Binns 2019).

The specific “pressure cooker” programme Sofie partook in consisted of two weekends, a week apart, in November 2016, in which participants were presented with a variety of lectures, workshops and coaching sessions with individual business coaches. The week in between the two weekends was meant to continue working on your idea, bearing in mind the advice that was provided during the first weekend. There were several “teams” working on a variety of projects, of which Sofie’s project was one. The teams listened to each other’s pitches and progress, but they were largely guided individually and had to hand in an individual proposal at the end of the process. Sofie finished the grant process, handed in her proposal, and indeed was awarded the amount she asked for. However, we do not focus so much here on the process after the money was awarded. Rather, we focus on the entrepreneurial teachings of the grant.

Sofie approached her innovative research project as a research experiment. Conducting such an active experiment is a way to look at the innovation process as a researcher, not by studying it, but by doing it yourself. We can understand this way of doing research by following Karen Barad’s calls for “intervening (i.e., experimenting) rather than representing (i.e., theorizing)” (Barad 2007, 51). Making an intervention “[puts] in play elements in a bricolage which afford insights through deliberate and careful juxtaposition” (Nelson 2006, 109). When something is created using such an approach, whether it is an object, a performance, or a material intervention, “the process of practitioner ‘action research’ is a conscious strategy to reflect upon established practice as well as to bring out ‘tacit knowledge1’” (Nelson 2006, 113). Sofie wrote up diary entries about her experiences, collected the pressure cooker material she was presented with, saved emails, and took pictures of the activities she did. Together, these experience-based data form the basis for our further reflection on how entrepreneurship was taught to her.

In this article, we transform the experience-based, enactive, and experimental research of Sofie into writing. This means reflecting on the concepts surrounding the practices,
activities, and experiences of the researcher-experimenter. In writing about the experiment Sofie did, and by bringing theory and practice together, we critically inquire into the process of innovation. We build upon some of Sofie’s observations on how she is taught to be an entrepreneur versus how she would have wanted to be an entrepreneur. We take inspiration from theories outside of journalism studies that we think to better represent her experiences and that might inspire others who are active in the field of entrepreneurial journalism.

**Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Journalism Studies and Education**

A variety of debates surround the intersection of entrepreneurship, innovation, and journalism (Cohen 2015; Deuze and Witschge 2020; Witschge and Harbers 2018; Singer 2016; Singer 2018; Mensing and Ryfe 2013). Entrepreneurial journalists are deemed to bring change and new ways to monetise journalistic output, as such answering to many a crisis. As pioneers (Hepp and Loosen 2019), they are seen as the saviours of the profession (Cohen 2015, 514). In this context of growing entrepreneurship and innovation in journalism, (young) journalists are increasingly educated to participate in the economy as entrepreneurs (Deuze and Witschge 2018, 175; Schaich and Klein 2013; Mensing and Ryfe 2013). It is important to get a picture of how entrepreneurship and innovation are conceptualised in the journalistic world, since it is a growing field of work and study. We look at how entrepreneurial journalism is taught in order to bring present discourses around innovation and entrepreneurship in journalism into focus. In this section, we therefore discuss some of the literature on entrepreneurship teaching to see how innovation is understood in the journalistic profession.

Entrepreneurship teaching is gaining popularity in the journalistic sector. Mensing and Ryfe (2013) argue that contemporary journalism educators should not focus too much on teaching journalism in the style of a “teaching hospital,” by which they mean a form of education that encourages students to learn journalistic skills, values and tools in the way that it has been practiced for years. Rather, they argue that the industry can benefit from entrepreneurship teaching:

- experimenting with small entrepreneurial businesses, collaborating with computer scientists, artists, and urban planners might not produce coverage of many city council meetings (although it could) but it may help journalism programs contribute research and development that will be more valuable to the long-term future of journalism (Mensing and Ryfe 2013, 31)

Entrepreneurship teaching is about rethinking the core values of journalism; teaching students to innovate encourages them to reimagine and rethink what journalistic work could mean in the future (Mensing and Ryfe 2013). It is about “pursuing change rather than resisting it” (Mensing and Ryfe 2013, 32).

Courses and degrees in journalistic entrepreneurship have been developed in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Colombia, Mexico, and The Netherlands (Deuze and Witschge 2018, 175). The idea behind such programmes is that an entrepreneurial model of journalism education “would lead journalists to contemplate the disruption of journalism, and (...) to invent practices that will ultimately replace the news industry we have now” (Mensing and Ryfe 2013, 27). These
Educational programmes aim to “equip students with the skills to create new journalism “products,” become versed in digital technologies, and develop business acumen, particularly in the areas of marketing and promotions” (Cohen 2015, 518).

There are different ways in which entrepreneurial skills are taught to journalists (Schaich and Klein 2013; Mensing and Ryfe 2013). Some of these approaches focus on developing cross-medial skills and an entrepreneurial mind-set. For instance, according to Mensing and Ryfe (2013, 35–39) educating an entrepreneurial journalist (1) means focusing on foundational courses that allow for critical reflection into the role journalism plays in the audience’s life, (2) means teaching skills and methods that are broader than traditional journalistic skills and include other tools such as programming or data visualisation, (3) includes more fluid sequence courses that provide opportunities to broaden students’ horizons beyond simply choosing “print” or “television” journalism, and (4) promotes internships with start-ups and other innovative journalistic projects.

Other approaches focus even more on teaching practical innovation. Schaich and Klein (2013, 195–196) conclude that many current entrepreneurship courses within journalistic programmes explicitly discuss and propagate hands-on innovation. Apart from teaching about theoretical concepts in entrepreneurship, these programmes for example invite entrepreneurship practitioners to guest lecture about their entrepreneurial project and encourage students to pitch and work on their own entrepreneurial projects. Overall, “there is a predominance of the learning by doing (projects), learning by listening (guests coming in) and case study approaches to teaching entrepreneurship in journalism” (Schaich and Klein 2013, 208).

Mostly, entrepreneurial journalism teaching is still in its infancy: “Entrepreneurial journalism is new. Teaching entrepreneurial journalism is even newer” (Schaich and Klein 2013, 209). Teachers often draw on teaching materials from blog posts, online articles, case studies, books, and guest speakers to build their curricula (Schaich and Klein 2013, 199). When asked what additional resources teachers need to improve their journalistic entrepreneurship education, the main answer was that they needed more detailed case studies (Schaich and Klein 2013, 199), as well as “business plans and templates adapted to entrepreneurial journalism” and in general more texts that focus on the particulars of entrepreneurship in journalism (Schaich and Klein 2013, 200).

It is important to stay critical of the kind of entrepreneurship that is being taught. Reflecting on entrepreneurial accelerator teaching, Parkkari (2015) critically looks at how people are being moulded by what is popularly understood as “good entrepreneurship.” There is a very particular “disciplining” nature to these entrepreneurial courses:

The ideal way here is very structured, efficient and rational: you start by presenting a problem you have identified, then proceed to tell your solution to this problem, then present that you already know who your customers will be and finally tell how you make money with your solution – and tell it in the form of a clear business model. This rational and efficient way of presenting your idea (and yourself) is done repeatedly during the program. (Parkkari 2015, 10)

The disciplinary nature of the way we teach entrepreneurship needs space for reflection and questioning. We cannot risk falling into dominant ideas of what a “good entrepreneur” is, because these can be “limiting the possibilities of doing entrepreneurship and who can be an entrepreneur” (Parkkari 2015, 20–21). There can be problematic aspects to entrepreneurship that need critical scrutiny (Parkkari 2015, 20–21).
Entrepreneurship is undertheorised in journalism studies (Barnes and Scheepers 2018, 95). There is a tendency to take the concept of entrepreneurship for granted, whereas it is actually a contested topic with a variety of ways to understand the process that comes with entrepreneurial activities. Here, we contribute to existing ideas of how to conceptualise entrepreneurial journalism and how to teach entrepreneurship to journalists, by providing a detailed case study of one journalistic entrepreneurial project and its journey through an entrepreneurial educational programme. We are aware that this particular teaching programme is not the only way of teaching entrepreneurship in journalism today, but we argue that it does represent one of the dominant discourses in the field. We delineate how particular teachings on marketing, pitching and business models affect the process of innovation, and offer an alternative. We wish to broaden our understanding to include literature on entrepreneurship that has thus far has received little attention in entrepreneurial journalism, starting with a more experiential account of an entrepreneurial coaching trajectory by a journalistic entrepreneur.

**Pressure Cooking Innovative Ideas: Planning and Testing as a Rational Process**

The innovation fund of the SVDJ has two main criteria. First of all, the proposed project has to be a journalistic project. For the fund, this means that it somehow contributes to the way that Dutch citizens form (political) opinions. Second, a project that seeks funding from the innovation fund must be innovative. For the fund, this means that the project reaches a new market or target audience, that it develops a new service or product, smoothens out an existing journalistic process, or that it is a journalistic project with a new business model. The innovation fund thus offers people an opportunity to “innovate” in line with what the fund understands as “innovation.”

Thus, the fund did not give out a subsidy that was to be used freely, to make more journalistic projects without a profitable result. Rather, it was a subsidy meant to be used as a first step to becoming a self-sustaining business. And so, the fund developed an accelerator programme to educate applicants and introduce them to ideas such as “the business model canvas,” “social media strategies,” and “elevator pitches.” They were training people to think like entrepreneurs—or at least how they presumed entrepreneurs to think. The pressure cooker programme integrated the above-mentioned entrepreneurial teaching approaches. It combined general entrepreneurial lessons, sessions with guest speakers who shared their experience with entrepreneurship in journalism, and work on your own entrepreneurial project.

We reflect here on two aspects of the lessons Sofie was presented with, the approach of “defining a problem” and “testing assumptions.” These reflections allow us to draw conclusions about how the philosophy behind the pressure cooker is in line with a more strategic, linear idea of entrepreneurship and we then argue for embracing a more open attitude towards the unknown in doing innovation in journalism.

**Defining a Problem**

The first thing that the funding programme asked Sofie and her project partner to do, before they could even apply, was to write down exactly what their project idea was
about and how it was innovative. This forced Sofie and her project partner to become very concrete about their ideas; whereas before they could talk about their idea in different ways to different people, now they were forced to pin down exactly what they wanted to do and why. Prior to that moment, they had been working in a free-flowing manner, going into any direction they felt like going, following their intuition.

Sofie met her partner in the project in a serendipitous encounter. They bumped into each other at a network meeting for media studies students and exchanged ideas. From there, they went on to brainstorm, bringing together what they thought to be valuable, public installations for meaningful encounters. They set up their first installations with make-do materials and improvised locations, one in the US, the home country of Sofie's partner, and one in the Netherlands, where Sofie resided. They intuitively decided on what materials to use and where to set up, with only minimal strategic planning, rather relying on what "felt right."

These first installations found excited users and brought about interesting encounters. Users said things like: "It was a first step to what I consider modern globalization. Our thoughts, ideas, opinions were being shared across seas. Beautiful, eye-opening experience." Another said: "Because you can look them in the eye, you know that what they say is really how they see things. It is not just something they type on Facebook without thinking about it first." These responses were very motivational to Sofie and her partner, and the positive feedback was their reason for applying for a grant.

To apply to the fund, Sofie and her partner were asked to come up with 100-word descriptions of their project and their plans. But there were so many perspectives on what was valuable about the installations Sofie and her partner were creating and so many different directions they could take. In their first, improvised, installations, Sofie and her partner talked about their work differently to different actors, explaining the value of their work depending on the context. How could they now pin down the project, based on an instrumental problem, as if there was just one path forward?

The pressure cooker was short and intense and thereby intensified the process of further definition and clarification. They had to define customers, a value proposition, and partners. The days were filled with different workshops, worksheets, and conversations with coaches where a variety of questions were to be answered. The coaching was done by a team of men who were trained to give business advice to beginning start-ups. Their coaching methods hardly ever referred to journalism, but instead completely relied on the financial side of setting up a business. The provided advice concerned business models, testing business assumptions about possible customers, and how to further develop marketing strategies.

One of the first lessons revolved around "finding the problem." There was a worksheet that was inspired by the notion of thinking about "solving problems." It, first of all, included a "when," "I want to," and "so I can" section that had to be filled in from the perspective of the customer. Sofie and her partner had to redesign the idea to fit this notion of fixing someone's problem that included a moment in time when someone had a need, what need she had, and what purpose that need served. Sofie and her partner also had to go into "the advantage," "it's hard because" and "riskiest assumptions" sections for the installation. Here, Sofie and her partner were expected to think about what advantage the work they proposed had in providing people with a solution that they would want
to pay for, what would make it hard and what would be the riskiest assumption about the idea on that the installation can solve someone’s problem.

It was interesting for Sofie to think about what problem the project was solving for individuals. She pinned the value proposition down to be about offering live, journalistic experiences, that bring the Dutch citizen an engaging and memorable way of interacting with relevant topics, to be shared with those in their immediate community. However, Sofie and her partner found it challenging to determine how to generate a financial profit with their idea, even if their first experiments had established that there was an added value to the installations’ users. The business model they eventually came up with, relied on the locations, rather than the direct user. The installations were to provide libraries, festivals, train stations and other public spaces with an activity that attracts people to come, to stay longer, and to come back, and to also provide inspired video and photographic material of interactions around the installations that could be used for marketing purposes.

Yet, the main motivation was not about selling people a solution to a problem. The idea for the installations was driven more by convictions about a greater good; about social values that cater to people’s curiosity about other places in the world, not necessarily because the installations were providing some instrumental solution to a private want or need. In entrepreneurship and thinking about making an idea profitable, it is very important to consider the needs of the people that an idea aims to serve. But it is here that Sofie, as a maker-researcher, hit exactly upon this point of the contradiction between the social purpose that a journalistic enterprise wishes to serve and the need to make profit from such work. For Sofie, it felt contradictory to think in this instrumental fashion about catering to people’s individual or commercial needs when what motivated the project was to help society at large by offering an engaging media experience.

**Testing Assumptions**

The coaches were very critical of every “assumption” made about the idea. They linked this to another one of their lessons concerning entrepreneurial thinking. They called this “the mom test,” because, maybe your mom would tell you something is good because she wants to be nice, but you should avoid believing that kind of positive feedback. We can find the following description of the mom test, which is very close to how the fund taught us about this topic:

> Ignoring compliments should be easy, but it’s not. We so desperately want to hear them that we are often tricked into registering them as positive data points instead of vacuous fibs. Sometimes it’s easier to spot the symptoms than to notice the original compliment. ‘That meeting went really well.’ ‘We’re getting a lot of positive feedback.’ ‘Everybody I’ve talked to loves the idea.’ All of these are warning signs. If you catch yourself or your teammates saying something like this, try to get specific. Why did that person like the idea? How much money would it save him? How would it fit into his life? What else has he tried which failed to solve his problem? If you don’t know, then you’ve got a compliment instead of real data.³

In testing the idea, Sofie was encouraged to be critical about all the positive beliefs she had about what the installation was doing. She was meant to gather as much information as possible about how she was solving a problem and what people would be willing to
pay for the solution. It was encouraged to gather “neutral data” rather than focus only on positive feedback.

The “testing” notion was embraced by Sofie and her partner in setting up more installations and questioning users and locations as to the value of the experience and whether or how this could generate income. However, neutral data gathering was not the only way this idea of “mom testing” came into the pressure cooker. Sofie and her partner were, at one point in the second weekend of the pressure cooker, pulled aside to be questioned by a coach they had not yet encountered before. This was done intentionally, to bring in a critical outside perspective. This man questioned Sofie and her partner with no excitement, but rather embodied the role of the “sceptic.” He expressed little faith in how the installations would ever generate income, did not seem to acknowledge any value in the public installation idea, and left the conversation unconvinced. Although we understand the value of gathering information about an entrepreneurial project, we wonder how this attitude of scepticism and “ignoring compliments” also staggers excited people to continue their work.

To only focus on “how much money it will save a person” and disregard any other value the work can have, can diminish an innovative project, particularly a journalistic one. Journalism has always had an ambiguous relationship towards finding business models for its public mission. Rather than bringing in coaches that embodied this ambiguity, the coaches were largely from commercial backgrounds. This left Sofie and her partner feeling somewhat disconnected in what they wanted to accomplish versus how they were asked to think about their project. Perhaps the assumptions about what was deemed valuable work were essentially different when comparing the ideas of the coaches to the values of Sofie and her partner.

When Sofie could get excited about the project because “people really loved it,” and when she wasn’t thinking about “what problem she was solving,” she moved more freely with the project. The focus was entirely on the value of the “greater good” of these cross-border dialogues, rather than on reframing it as an instrumental, moneymaking project. It was a feeling out and slow process of sensing her next move toward facilitating more engaging and more transnational experiences. Instead of rational planning or strategising, hers was a more tentative process of thinking about what email to send next or what organisation to approach. After participating in the pressure cooker, decisions were made more rationally and aimed at a specific goal rather than looking at a next step in any kind of direction. In adopting a more critical mind-set, Sofie had become somewhat sceptical of her own enthusiasm for what the installations could offer. Although she was “successful” in obtaining a grant from the fund, she lost the passion for her work in the process.

Journalistic work most often has an important, public mission, and journalistic entrepreneurs need to be able to embody that mission. Singer (2016) discusses the business model canvas and the way that entrepreneurs in journalism need to answer different questions to come to a working business model. She says that

rightly or wrongly, journalists tend to view their distance from the economic realities of the news industry as both a mark and a guarantor of their editorial autonomy, and therefore of their ability to serve the public interest honestly and impartially. Such a normative stance may indeed retain its social value, but it presents obstacles that go beyond those any entrepreneur necessarily faces in turning an idea into a profitable, sustainable business. (Singer 2016, 135)
To propose business coaching to journalistic entrepreneurs involves an awareness of this tension between the civic mission and the commercial mission. Although there are indeed obstacles to be overcome for the public mission of journalistic work to find business models, somewhat “ignoring” the journalistic mission in providing business coaching is, in our eyes, not the way forward for journalism education.

We now wish to propose a different perspective on the process of innovation in journalism. Rather than involving strategic, commercial lessons, it might require a more processual philosophy of how innovation processes come about. This allows for more room for intuitive growing in combining a vision of a public mission with finding a source of income for one’s work.

**Viewing Entrepreneurship from a Process-oriented Perspective**

For Sofie, the reason to do the work she was doing was very personal. The force behind the project was one of passion, emotion, and a sense of needing to see this idea come to life. Although there were rational reasons for explaining why her project was worthwhile, these reasons did not instigate or drive it. In the pressure cooker process, “reality [was chopped] into discrete pieces” (Nayak and Chia 2011, 290). In the process, Sofie was asked to rationally scrutinise the idea Sofie and her partner brought in, to make representations and strategies to help find future direction. But in this process, focusing on the rational, the “vital aspects of our lived experiences” are left out or distorted (Nayak and Chia 2011, 290).

The idea behind the installations is much broader than what could be captured in a rational explanation of what “problem it was solving” or what rational “data” Sofie could gather about her project. A critical reflection on such a pressure cooker programme aimed at making entrepreneurship a rational, goal-oriented and linear process, invites us to consider a different, processual, perspective on how entrepreneurship can be understood as having to do with emergence and improvisation.

If we take a process-philosophical point of view, people, institutions and other entities are always changing, emerging and transforming (Nayak and Chia 2011, 282). For Sofie, this fits her reality, in particular before she entered into the pressure cooker environment. The idea was fluid and changed according to whom she talked about it at what moment. It had a life of its own, which was full of paradoxes that could not be rationally explained. And her relationship with the idea was as emergent, rich and fluid. This does not mean that we should not talk about ideas, or act upon them. It is through our practices of sense-making and construction of identities that people create “a more coherent and liveable world” (Nayak and Chia 2011, 289). However, to see the world as existing out of taxonomies, hierarchies and systems is to misunderstand and represent a “reductive view of reality, one that causes us to miss much of what life as actively lived offers” (Nayak and Chia 2011, 291). If we think about life as being made up of change, flux and transformation, everything is always already becoming something else, it is always moving (Nayak and Chia 2011, 293).

From a processual perspective, we can understand the way in which an entrepreneurial idea comes into existence as a process of “emergence” (Morris and Webb 2015). The emergence process develops out of “a tension between order and disorder, routinized behaviour and creativity, predictability and chaos” in which many variables play a role (Morris and Webb 2015, 464). If we see an entrepreneurial firm as emerging, as something that
slowly becomes in relation to its environment and many other factors, the resulting project becomes one possible outcome of many and therefore it is difficult to think about a “master plan” that is created beforehand (Morris and Webb 2015, 459). It is a “messy process” in which the outcome can be very different from what one imagined (Morris and Webb 2015, 459–460). This emerging perspective and its messiness were barely acknowledged by the coaches that the fund had hired to help Sofie work on her ideas. She was expected to sort, test, and streamline her work, rather than give into the unknown.

Sofie felt like there was more at play than a rational, reasoned movement in her doing entrepreneurial work. Instead, her process was more intuitive; motivated, but not rationally definable. We can then take the process philosophy, in which the idea is beyond what is being made rather than a blueprint before one moves, to better grasp how people make choices and how organisations come to be. People don’t need explicit end-goals to act with purpose (Chia 2017, 108). As such, we can understand entrepreneurship as improvisation and gain a better insight into the actual process underlying the journalistic practices. As Nayak and Chia point out, a processual perspective provides insight into important elements of entrepreneurship that otherwise do not gain the necessary attention:

Positional thinking that aims to plan, forecast, calculate and fix the future outcomes before acting does not engage with the deep processual issues underpinning entrepreneurship. A processual approach reveals the significance of doubt, hesitation and wayfinding in understanding human action. (Nayak and Chia 2011, 303–304)

Starting from this view, means we understand that people do not always need end-goals or plans to take coherent action (Chia 2017, 108). For entrepreneurs too, as entrepreneur researcher Johannisson (2011, 136) found in his research, actions are hardly ever intentionally planned, but often rely on “irrationalities” such as passion, emotion and, improvisation.

Karl Weick traces the concept and considers the two parts “proviso” and “im.” “Provision” means “to make a stipulation beforehand, to provide for something in advance, or to do something that is premeditated” (Weick 1998, 544). Placing “im” in front of that, implies that it means the opposite: “Thus improvisation deals with the unforeseen, it works without a prior stipulation, it works with the unexpected” (Weick 1998, 544). A prominent example of improvisational activity is that of performing jazz music, which has gained prominence as a metaphor for people’s behaviour in organisational contexts (Barrett 1998; Weick 1998). Making jazz is about “leaping into the unknown, hanging out on a limb” and it has to do with “engaging in an activity in which the future is largely unknown, yet one in which one is expected to create something novel and coherent, often in the presence of an audience” (Barrett 1998, 606). Jazz improvisation depends on taking this leap into the unknown, while simultaneously being in excellent control of your instrument and playing with the expectations of your audience and the other players in terms of a “collaborative emergence” (Sawyer 2000). In other words, improvisation requires engaging with the unknown from a position of preparedness.

To understand organisations and how people cooperate with a form of excited energy we can take jazz as a metaphor. Barrett notices how musicians often establish a “groove” together: “It involves a shared “feel,” for the rhythmic thrust. Once a group shares this
common rhythm, it begins to assume a momentum, as if having a life of its own separate
from the individual members” (Barrett 1998, 614). When establishing a groove, players
often speak of a transcendent moment. It “seems to involve a surrender of familiar con-
trolled processing modes; they speak of being so completely absorbed in playing that
they are not consciously thinking, reflecting, or deciding on what notes to play” (Barrett 1998, 614). These kinds of affective qualities that often have to do with
working together with others on something that all the involved people find motivating
and that they care deeply about, requires more attention. The “experience of spiritual inti-
macy, synergy, surrender, transcendence, and flow” has been given little attention in
organisational research whereas it often plays an important role, not just in music, but
also in other contexts where people work together (Barrett 1998, 615).

To understand this process, we can draw on the theory of theory of effectuation
(Sarasvathy 2001) which views entrepreneurship in terms of the improvisational,
affective character of entrepreneurial work. This theory positions “effectuation” processes
as opposite to “causation” processes. Causation, here, refers to a way of strategising
wards realising an entrepreneurial firm by focusing on a very particular effect and
selecting the means to create that effect, whereas effectuation emphasises the possible
means one has at one’s disposal and see what kind of effects one can create with
those means (Sarasvathy 2001, 245). Sarasvathy uses the example of cooking a meal,
where a causation process might involve selecting a recipe and then collecting all the
necessary ingredients, whereas effectuation would be to look in one’s cupboards at
what is available and then create a dish with what is at hand (Sarasvathy 2001, 245).
The consequence is that “causation models consist of many-to-one mappings, effectua-
tion models involve one-to-many mappings” (Sarasvathy 2001, 245).

Talking about how to approach a market as an effectuator, Sarasvathy explains that
effectuators are more focused on creating their own market by collecting stakeholders
who support their idea, while a causation perspective views a market as something
that is external to a project, there for the “grabbing” (Sarasvathy 2001, 252). Effectuation
leaves more room for slow growth, unpredictability, the unknowable, and takes into
account how a general goal might be clear—the creation of a new firm—but that the
way to achieve that goal is open to ambiguity (Nayak and Chia 2011, 302 discussing
the work of Sarasvathy). Effectuation also takes the individuals who are doing entrepre-
neurship and their particular motivations and set of means available to them more
seriously, rather than focusing on a perspective of some omniscient observer (Nayak
and Chia 2011, 302 discussing the work of Sarasvathy).

Concluding Remarks: Analysing and Teaching Journalistic
Entrepreneurship as Wayfinding

The effectuation model has been recognised as a valuable model for entrepreneurship in
journalism (Barnes and Scheepers 2018). Rather than focussing on a rational plan for
creating a business, this way of working starts out from the questions: “‘Who am I?’,
‘What do I know?’ and ‘Whom do I know?’” (Barnes and Scheepers 2018, 98). Starting
from oneself and one’s resources often means starting small, and it is about wayfinding
with a convincing narrative that draws in others and moves the project into the future
(Barnes and Scheepers 2018, 98). By moving slowly and by learning from what works
and what doesn’t, journalism entrepreneurs “reduce the uncertainty and gain control over their environments through action and learning, not planning or prediction” (Barnes and Scheepers 2018, 98–99). Much in the same way as jazz musicians who improvise collaboratively, the journalism entrepreneur uses wayfinding to draw out, and grow to gain control over their entrepreneurial experience.

Viewing entrepreneurship as wayfinding allows us to see the process as moving by embracing the unknown, as Tim Ingold describes it (2013). Rather than simply shaping materials, means and networks to fit a particular image that we have made in advance, the process-oriented anthropologist Ingold underlines the importance of reconsidering the process of creation as something that “grows”: “To read making longitudinally, as a confluence of forces and material, rather than laterally, as a transposition from image to object, is to regard it as such a form-generating—or morphogenetic—process.” (Ingold 2013, 22). When talking about how people “make” things, Ingold often comes back to the concept of “correspondence,” by which he means to say that it is not about “the imposition of preconceived form on raw material substance, but the drawing out or bringing forth of potentials immanent in a world of becoming” (Ingold 2013, 31). To correspond with an idea, is to be in tune with the process of creation and the possibilities that a particular idea has to offer.

What does it meant to view entrepreneurship from a process-theoretical perspective in journalism studies and in particular also in how we teach entrepreneurship in this domain? For one, it would focus scholarly attention to entrepreneurship not as rational steps taken in a linear way, but approaches the process as a movement into the unknown, an experiment with bringing a new idea to life. Rather than moving in a way of “navigating” where one knows rationally where one is going before one moves, it is also possible to “wayfind” (Chia 2017). This wayfinding is often done in times of uncertainty or when moving into unknown territory. It is about sensing what is needed and adapting to the circumstances, rather that presupposing that we must know “before we go,” we can also “know as we go” (Chia 2017, 108). It is possible to move with purpose without specifically knowing where one is going, and this way of making decisions is often more common when there are a lot of unknown variables to consider.

We can draw here also on insights from “design thinking” (Dorst 2011, 531), an increasingly popular approach to more “effectuate” ways of thinking. Although it is not within the scope of this paper to give an exhaustive account of the large body of literature on design thinking (for an extensive review see for example Dell’Era et al. 2020), we see that there are also thinkers in this area that emphasise the importance of the “informal activity” of coming to new ways of thinking about complex problems (Dorst 2011, 528). Put briefly, thinking with design is “reasoning in ways fundamentally different from the reasoning in fields predominantly based on analysis (deduction, induction) and problem solving” (Dorst 2011, 525). Rather than the more rational, linear process of going from a very explicit problem to a rational solution, design thinking often goes “sideways” in establishing themes and new frames for looking at a situation. In the process of finding new “frames” for thinking about design ideas, “designers refer to “getting close” to the situation, they talk about the importance of the “richness” of the problem area” (Dorst 2011, 528). In such a process, “their [the designer’s] behaviour may look quite hit-and-miss” (Dorst 2011, 528), but is in fact an intentional yet intuitive way to come to emerging themes.
What would it mean to adopt such a perspective in practices such as the “pressure cooker” or “accelerator”? The pressure cooker Sofie took part in worked with a more causation-based model for innovation that left little room for intuitive searching. Sofie was asked to come up with a clear plan of where she wanted her idea to go. Although there was room to change one’s idea, similar to the idea of a “pivot” as a strategic change (Kirtley and O’Mahony 2020), planning, testing and strategising remained central to the pressure cooker’s approach. Wayfinding and tentative action were overlooked, amidst the focus on defining actionable goals. In other words, the pressure cooker facilitated one kind of entrepreneurial education and learning; fast-paced and—as the name “pressure cooker” already implies—solidifying a marketable or fundable idea. In line with Barnes and Scheepers (2018, 109) we argue that this focus of entrepreneurship teaching on bringing in business modelling and a more causation-based model for innovation negates a more fruitful, collective, and inspired process that springs from an engagement in cross-disciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, we envision opportunities for more process-oriented approaches to entrepreneurship education in journalism studies, that embrace the notion that successful innovation involves wayfinding and improvisation.

This is particularly relevant as journalism is a profession under quite some pressure to find new business models (Nielsen 2016, 62), and such pressure can “create cultures that reinforce instrumental, pragmatic, rational, and deliberate action” (Barrett 1998, 617). As we have noted here, it is important to engage in practices that are “expressive, artistic, paradoxical, and spontaneous” (Barrett 1998, 617). Building upon the ideas of emergence, improvisation and effectuation, we invite journalism scholars to consider alternative forms of “pressure cooker,” “accelerator,” or other “entrepreneurship courses” for journalism entrepreneurs. We propose to imagine a more expressive and spontaneous entrepreneurship teaching. To take ideas of improvisation, wayfinding, and effectuation as a new lens to consider the entrepreneurial processes. Although improvisation implies the focus on the “unforeseen,” making it seemingly difficult to organise, it is possible to create structures, spaces and places where improvisation can flourish. We can think of spaces such as a living laboratory, where collective innovation is encouraged through sharing knowledge and solutions to problems that encourage participants to listen and experiment (Sauer and Bonelli 2020).

The scope of this article was critical reflection on entrepreneurship teaching and inspiration towards a different philosophy for thinking about the process of innovation. Our study was limited to the discussion of one accelerator process, and we propose further study of accelerators and entrepreneurship teachings in journalism schools and foundations to critically assess the existing discourses in the field. We also encourage further enactive research that engages with the actual creation of spaces based on ideas of a living laboratory, design thinking spaces, or effectuation models, to experiment with what a process-philosophy based entrepreneurial teaching programme would look like.

Notes

1. Tacit knowledge is conceived of as knowledge that is not explicit, or – as Collins discusses – knowledge that cannot be made explicit (Collins 2010, 4).
2. See https://www.svdj.nl/regeling/innovateregeling/ for more information on the innovation fund.
3. https://www.coursehero.com/file/p78pqtm/Them-Even-more-workflow-and-alternate-solution-data-If-were-early-in-the/

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