

# Resilience and entrepreneurship: A dynamic and biographical approach to the entrepreneurial act

Marie-Josée Bernard ● Saulo Dubard Barbosa

**Abstract.** Resilience in the literature of Entrepreneurship is largely presented as a personality trait of the entrepreneur. Our approach is to study it as a process and to explore in detail the role that a resilience dynamic can play in the decision to become an entrepreneur. We recorded the life stories of three resilient entrepreneurs and analysed in detail their experiences, which include a total of 206 critical events. From this analysis, we have drawn up a model based on trauma theory as a trigger of the resilience process, highlighting the key elements that feed this process. We note that several of these elements are precursors to the entrepreneurial initiative: resilience mentors offer the emotional support necessary to enable the individual to build a social network; commitment to action enables experiences and interactions that are a source of learning; interim victories and self-esteem work bring the legitimacy and self-confidence that are indispensable to becoming an entrepreneur later on. Finally, the search for meaning and coherence highlights the gaps between the personal values of the individual and the managerial practices of the employer organisation, thereby contributing to encouraging the individual towards entrepreneurship and shaping his or her business start-up project. Thus our study demonstrates that the resilience dynamic can play a multidimensional role at the interface of causal factors leading to entrepreneurship.

**Marie-Josée Bernard**  
EM Lyon Business School  
M.J.Bernard@em-lyon.com

**Saulo Dubard Barbosa**  
EM Lyon Business School  
barbosa@em-lyon.com

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To date, literature in the field of Entrepreneurship has understood the concept of resilience as a response to a difficult or even extreme context (Danes, Lee, Amarapurkar, Stafford, Haynes & Brewton, 2009), or otherwise as a personality trait, quality or ability of the entrepreneur (Hayward, Forster, Sarasvathy & Fredrickson, 2010). Whilst studies of entrepreneurship use the concept of resilience in a more or less nuanced way, it is viewed in most studies as a form of emotional and cognitive ability that is useful for the entrepreneur, particularly when bouncing back after failures connected to their entrepreneurial initiative. Resilience is thus considered an asset when facing difficulties and not as a dynamic driving force of sufficient strength to be considered the catalyst for starting out on the entrepreneurial process itself. The result is a burgeoning body of literature that, until recently, has studied the impact of resilience on entrepreneurship whilst underestimating the aspect of process and evolution in relation to resilience in the life trajectory of individuals.

This paper aims to study resilience as a dynamic process, by questioning its role in the decision to become an entrepreneur. We thus focus on the resilience dynamic sparked by significant life events, causing trauma, and occurring prior to the decision to embark on an entrepreneurial

project. It is clear that not all entrepreneurs are resilient and that it is not necessary to go through a process of resilience (or to have experienced a traumatic event) in order to become an entrepreneur. However, the works of Albert Shapero on the concept of displacement (Shapero, 1975; Shapero & Sokol, 1982) suggest that certain critical events relating to the life contexts of individuals can drive them to the decision to become entrepreneurs and to take action. In order to further understanding of the socio-psychological factors linking displacement and the decision to become an entrepreneur, a focus on the processes of resilience can create new theoretical points of reference in order to better place each displacement within the life trajectory of individuals. Thus, we hope to contribute to the study of the decision to become an entrepreneur and engagement in the entrepreneurial process by exploring the following question: What role can the resilience dynamic play in triggering the decision to become an entrepreneur?

We explore this question through a study of three “revelatory” (as described by Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013) life stories, from three entrepreneurs whose evolution we followed and whom we interviewed regularly from 2006 to 2010. We present a complete study of these three life stories, which we encoded with reference to both themes and concepts. We thus develop a model that highlights the key factors in the resilience process, including its origins, development and the key factors contributing to the decision to become an entrepreneur.

The notion of process is at the centre of our study because it is an idea that is relevant to all the major concepts upon which we draw. Firstly, we look at resilience as a dynamic process of absorbing a shock that has been experienced, of putting oneself back together, and of producing meaning from an experience, all through interactions with one’s environment, which is a support and aide to the dynamic itself (Anaut, 2005; Charreire Petit & Cusin, 2013; Cyrulnik & Duval, 2006). Subsequently, we explore the role of this dynamic in triggering the decision to become an entrepreneur. Despite differences in how it is defined, researchers in the field agree on the fact that entrepreneurship is a process (Fayolle, 2007; Gartner, 1985; Shane, 2012; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Steyaert & Hjorth, 2007; Verstraete & Fayolle, 2004). For example, Bygrave (1989: 21) affirms: “*Entrepreneurship is a process of becoming rather than a state of being.*” Bruyat (1993) distinguishes three main stages of the entrepreneurial process, namely, the triggering of the process, commitment or taking action, and the survival/failure/development phase. Our focus on the initial decision to become an entrepreneur aims to illuminate the first phases of the entrepreneurial process, particularly the moment it is triggered, in order to better “understand the dynamics leading an individual to move to an active phase of development of a business start-up project” (Bruyat, 1993: 299).

By investigating the role played by the resilience dynamic in the triggering of the decision to become an entrepreneur, this paper complements other research studies which are starting to open up to a more dynamic approach to resilience in the field of Management. For example, a process-oriented and dynamic vision of resilience is very present in the study of organisational resilience (Altintas & Royer, 2009; Bégin & Chabaud, 2010; Hollnagel, Journé & Laroche, 2009; Merminod, Mothe & Rowe, 2009; Tillement, Cholez & Reverdy, 2009) and the individual trajectories of whistle-blowers (Charreire Petit & Cusin, 2013). In Entrepreneurship, a collective work coordinated by Martine Brasseur (2009) started to evoke the concept of a resilience dynamic within the specific perspective of social inclusion. Bernard (2008) suggests a

“theoretical meeting” between entrepreneurship and the resilience dynamic. Moreover, a number of researchers have taken an interest in narrative approaches in order to study entrepreneurial phenomena (Gartner, 2007; Garud & Giuliani, 2013), given the importance of the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of the entrepreneurial process (Bygrave, 1989; Bruyat, 1993; Fayolle, 2007; Gartner, 1985, 1990; Shane, 2012; Steyaert & Hjorth, 2007).

This paper is structured in the following way: In the first section, we revisit the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of resilience in the relevant literature from the field of Psychology and present its principal applications with regard to the literature on Entrepreneurship. We then lay down the conceptual basis that will be developed and completed by our empirical study, with a detailed explanation of our methodology given in the second section. The third section sets out the results of our study, presenting the model of the resilience process that we created through the analysis of the three life journeys studied. We conclude this article with a thorough discussion of the contributions of the study, as well as its limitations and future research pathways which may stem from it in literature dealing with Entrepreneurship.

## THEORETICAL BASIS OF RESILIENCE AND ITS APPLICATIONS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The origin of the concept of resilience is to be found in the physics of materials. Within this framework of reference, resilience describes “*the resistance of materials subjected to a forceful shock and a structure’s capacity to absorb the kinetic energy of its environment without breaking*” (dictionnaire Robert).

The concept of resilience was then “invested” by the field of Psychology in the 1950s with the first studies by Emmy Werner, and her publications of 1971. Since then, literature in the field of Social Sciences has seen a profusion of studies relating to the theme of resilience, which reflect the lack of consensus that persists to this day on the definition of the concept (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000; McCubbin, 2001). However, a certain number of writers believe that the definition of resilience must absolutely include two essential conditions, namely: *exposure to a context of adversity* corresponding to a serious threat, a significant source of stress, a trauma, and secondly, *a positive adaptation translating into some sort of evolution*, despite the risks taken and obstacles to development (Bonanno, 2012; Luthar *et al.*, 2000; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; McCubbin, 2001; Théorêt, 2005).

Charreire Petit & Cusin (2013) have identified different definitions of resilience in the literature and use three dimensions in their study: absorption of shocks sustained, reconstruction, particularly in the professional sphere, and the production of meaning from the situation experienced. We also use these dimensions in our research whilst taking into account the complete life stories of the people studied<sup>1</sup>.

In the literature of Psychology the different approaches to resilience can be grouped into three major research threads which have developed contrasting positions: the first is highly focussed on the study of conditions for emergence of resilience, in terms of risk factors and protection factors and the dynamic of these factors (Garmezy 1991; Rutter, 2006; Werner, Bierman, & French, 1971; Werner & Smith, 1982); the second is concerned with resilience in terms of personality traits, abilities and behaviour of

1. Charreire Petit & Cusin (2013) analyse the trajectory of resilience of footballer Jacques Glassmann since his whistle-blowing incident in 1993. We allowed the subjects of our study to choose freely the temporal framework of their life story accounts during our interviews so they were able to come back spontaneously to events in their childhood.

individuals (Bonanno, 2004; Gunnar, 1978; Joubert & Raeburn, 1998; Poilpot, 1999); the third centres on the intrapsychic dimension of resilience and interactions with the environment, which acts as an aide and support of the dynamic itself (Anaut, 2005; Cyrulnik & Duval, 2006; Lecomte et al., 2005). We note that, to date, the two first approaches have been used in Entrepreneurship literature but the third is much less studied.

## RESILIENCE IN THE LITERATURE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In order to carry out our literature review on the concept of resilience in entrepreneurship, we have used two simple heuristics. Firstly, we searched for academic articles dealing explicitly with the concept of resilience in the field of entrepreneurship. Subsequently, in view of our research question, we concentrated on articles dealing with the phases preceding the entrepreneurial process, which bring to light the different ways of triggering the process whilst implicitly or explicitly evoking concepts close to the notion of resilience. This method allowed us to identify two major categories of approaches to resilience in Entrepreneurship literature: those that favour the concept of trait, ability or quality; and those that put forward the contextual dimension by seeing resilience as a response to an extremely difficult situation.

A third branch of research studying reactions to entrepreneurial failure also uses concepts close to the notion of resilience (such as coping, stress and resistance) but does not explicitly deal with this idea and focusses, by definition, on the later phases of the entrepreneurial process (Byrne et Shepherd, 2015; Jenkins, Wiklund & Brundin, 2014; Shepherd, 2003; Shepherd, Patzelt & Wolfe, 2011). As a result, we will not cover these studies here. Neither will we deal with works referring to the concept of resilience or coping in the context of career management (Arora & Rangnekar, 2014; Baker Caza & Milton, 2012; McLarnon & Rothstein, 2013; Nandkeolyar, Shaffer, Li, Ekkirala & Bagger, 2014), which are largely removed from our research question and the field of Entrepreneurship.

Appendix A gives an overview highlighting the main approaches to the concept of resilience in Entrepreneurship literature. None of these studies elucidate the mechanisms of resilience, resilience is simply identified in different forms. The definitions of different facets of resilience, as a cognitive and emotional capacity, carry with them the key assumption that resilience comprises a positive ability: namely, the ability to adapt to risky or highly stressful situations. The concept of resilience is therefore seen as a personality trait<sup>2</sup> associated with other positive traits, but stripped of context and any process-related dimension. These works tend to neglect the dynamic aspect of the psychological and vital process that resilience represents.

Concerning the works that approach resilience as a response to a difficult situation, they often tend to make an amalgam between what is described as a context of adversity and the term “resilient”. For example, there is a wealth of literature on the economic resilience of regions, defined by their capacity to deal with economic crises (Huggins et Thompson, 2015; Williams & Vorley, 2014). Most of these works do not analyse the individual and neglect studies on resilience from the field of Psychology. The term “resilience” becomes a simple qualifier for regions and companies capable of surmounting the crisis.

Finally, even works that focus on the psychology of the entrepreneur (such as those by Bullough & Renko, 2013, and Bullough et al., 2014) conclude by presenting resilience as a quality and positive emotion. Whilst this view may certainly be interesting, it very often neglects the essential

2. The first phrase of the article by Manzano-García & Ayala Calvo (2013) is telling: “An entrepreneur is an individual with a special gift...” (p. 245).

historical dimension of the occurrence of trauma and its consequences in the process of reconstruction of the individual (Cyrulnik & Seron, 2003; Ferrenczi, 1934/2006).

*The concept of displacement: a precursor of resilience in the field of Entrepreneurship*

Whilst the main research threads linked to the concept of resilience in Entrepreneurship do not take enough interest in the dynamic aspect and the role of the resilience process in the phases preceding the decision to become an entrepreneur, it should be noted that the studies developed by Shapero and colleagues (Shapero, 1975, 1982; Shapero & Sokol, 1982) represent an exception. According to Shapero (1982), significant life events (such as a job loss, migration, family-related events, etc.) can trigger the decision to become an entrepreneur. In such contexts, the individuals have not necessarily changed, but their perceptions of “new” circumstances have evolved. The entrepreneurial potential may be present, but it requires a “displacement” in order to show itself.

Indeed, Shapero uses the term “displacement” to show that the occurrence of a significant phenomenon, positive or negative, could trigger the decision to become an entrepreneur. When he talks about an individual delaying the move towards entrepreneurship, Shapero cites difficult situations experienced either in the professional sphere or in social or family life, or even happier circumstances relating to encouragement to realise other ambitions. The typology of events/displacements presented by Shapero certainly constitutes a source of information worthy of further attention in seeking to understand the triggering of the decision to choose entrepreneurship.

However, this typology only presents the event/displacement in a descriptive dimension. In fact, Shapero only considers a few possible events, rarely their intensity, and never the resilience mechanisms that assist the individual in getting on with life and moving past the displacements through transforming them. In his works, the concept of event is dealt with in a contextual and “exogenous” way, even if Shapero offers the view that: “*some displacements are internal to the entrepreneur in that they are generated without reference to anything but the passage of time*” (1982: 72).

Studies on entrepreneurial intention draw on certain elements of Shapiro’s model, notably in order to combine them with the theory of planned behaviour (Krueger, 1993; Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000). Nonetheless, in most of these works, the concept of displacement is left aside. Determinants on entrepreneurial intention are thus understood in terms of individual attitudes and perceptions in relation to social norms and the control the individual might have over the results of their action (Ajzen, 1991, 2002; Krueger & Carsrud, 1993), and in terms of perceived feasibility and desirability (Krueger et al., 2000). Consequently, these studies place emphasis on the individual (or social) characteristics that contribute to increasing or decreasing entrepreneurial intent, but only rarely touch on the move to act and not at all on past trauma and the resilience dynamic that may well trigger this move to act.

In order to study in greater depth those resilience mechanisms that may potentially contribute to the transformation of a difficulty or displacement into an entrepreneurial act, we look at the personal history of individuals, the critical events of their lives and the way they have experienced them. We therefore recorded information on the life stories of three entrepreneurs who experienced a significant trauma in their childhood followed by different types of adversity all through their lives. We

then questioned the role played by the resilience dynamic in their decision to become entrepreneurs.

## RESEARCH METHOD

In view of our research question, we employed a qualitative and longitudinal method for the study of the life trajectories of our three resilient entrepreneurs. This method encouraged moving back and forth between the chosen subject area and literature relating to the concepts covered. It is inspired by “grounded theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We also adopted a biographical approach, which requires compiling extremely detailed information on the life stories of the chosen subjects in order to better understand the process studied in a longitudinal way.

### CHOICE OF PARTICIPANTS

In the spirit of “theoretical sampling” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we selected entrepreneurs likely to provide us with a wealth of material, who clearly highlight the relationships between the concepts of resilience and entrepreneurship (this choice was the subject of numerous in-depth discussions with Dr. Cyrulnik). For us, it was essential to find “revealing” cases in the sense employed by Gioia et al. (2013), i.e., cases presenting a strong potential in terms of shedding new light on a little-studied phenomenon (Langley & Abdallah, 2011), namely, the role of the resilience process in triggering the decision to become an entrepreneur.

To begin with, the individuals interviewed first met with the lead author in a pedagogical context and their progress through the stages of their business start-up project (preceding phases, start-up phase, and development phase for the longest-running project) was then followed (more or less) closely. Having ensured that a prior agreement was reached with regard to the suggested procedure, the lead author commenced a series of interviews with each entrepreneur. As the interviews progressed, the interviewees confided their experiences to the interviewer and made connections naturally between their current projects and significant life events, including those from their early childhood.

The extreme delicacy required in asking the interviewees to speak as openly as possible about the significant events in their lives, including the most difficult, should be highlighted as the concept of resilience was clearly presented from the beginning of the study. Thanks to the trust established previously with the lead author, whose professional ethics were checked by the three entrepreneurs, the interviewees agreed to make themselves available to allow us to carry out the different stages of our work in terms of gathering information about their life experiences. Table 1 below details the profiles of the study’s participants.

### GATHERING INFORMATION AND RECORDING LIFE EXPERIENCES

Recording of interviews was carried out by the lead author. She undertook six to eight interviews in successive stages with each interviewee, totalling between nine and twelve interview hours per person, not counting the many informal discussions resulting from the interviews. From the start of the study, she maintained regular contact with each interviewee at every stage of development and data processing.

**Table 1.** Overview of entrepreneurs' profiles and the businesses created

	Life Story 1 - Tomas	Life Story 2 – Mathieu	Life Story 3 –Yves
Number of interviews (average duration: 1.5 hours)	September 2006 to January 2007: 4 September to December 2007: 3 Start of 2008: 1	September 2006 to January 2007: 3 September to December 2007: 3 Start of 2008: 1	September 2006 to January 2007: 3 September to December 2007: 2 Start of 2008: 1
Original traumatic events	Illness with long-term hospitalisation - Disability	Abandonment – Birth in a war-zone – Exile - Adoption with mistreatment	Separation and distance after younger brother's birth Impossibility of going to secondary school Difficult family context: discrimination amongst siblings, father's alcoholism
Nature of resilience as it first appeared	Family relations High-level sports Involvement in sports association Importance of his own family	Religious and spiritual Involvement in association and social dimension Importance of own family	Investment in professional traineeship Involvement in politics and association Creation of entrepreneurial activities Paternal responsibility
Pre-entrepreneurship training	Double engineering diploma, with specialisation in IT and applied mathematics.	Business school followed by related training at the INSEAD and at the IMD.	"Self-taught" - BEP in electrics – in-company management training with large company – DU (university diploma) in addiction studies
Pre-creation responsibility	Management of IT department and other posts with responsibility, notably in banking organisations.	Number 2 position in a large multinational	Regional management Executive manager
Age at time of business start-up	44	33	54
Year of start-up	2004	2006	2000
Company activity	Recruitment and consultancy for the employment of people with disabilities: the company aims to assist other businesses to recruit disabled workers and offers advice on this, whilst fostering an approach to difference and how to integrate the skills of these people.	Finance and support for new entrepreneurs: the company aims to encourage and democratise investment and create fruitful meetings between the entrepreneurial and investment worlds.	Prevention, training and support for companies on the risks and psycho-social aspects of addiction: the aim of the company is to prevent addictions and raise awareness of health at work. The first aims were diagnosis and prevention procedures and training on the risks of alcoholism in organisations.

The first series of interviews was carried out between September 2006 and January 2007. The second round of meetings took place between September and December 2007. After completion of the data gathering, a summary of critical events was drawn up for each interviewee, naming each event and connecting it to the impact produced on the individual. The events in question are very varied in nature and have multidimensional effects. The lead author then submitted the information to the interviewees and we continued our analytical investigation following these discussions. The first line of Table 1 details the number of interviews carried out with each person for each stage of the data collection. The duration of the interviews varied between one and two hours. Obviously this does not include informal exchanges (by telephone or e-mail) maintained on a more or less regular basis until the end of 2010.

Despite the workload involved, we opted for complete transcription of the discourse of each interviewee. The transcriptions were completed following the interview stage and were submitted twice to each interviewee, in 2008 and 2009. The transcriptions required approximately 80 hours of work. The text for each transcription represents between 40 and 45 pages for each story.

The transcriptions were also subject to successive proofreading, both by ourselves and the interviewees. In 2008 and 2009 the lead author looked at all the work again, listening for a second time to the recorded interviews with each of the three entrepreneurs, taking the time to allow each person to comment. These confirmation meetings were also recorded. Table 2 below presents a summary of the life stories studied.

**Table 2.** Summary of each of the three life stories

Story 1 – Tomas
The subject was aged 44 when he embarked on his entrepreneurship project. He started a consulting company for the recruitment of disabled persons. He is disabled himself, following a bout of Polio, which was discovered very early on. As a child, he faced many challenges connected with his health. In adolescence he developed a passion for table tennis, which became his primary “springboard” for resilience. He became a high-level sportsperson in this sport and won all the titles associated with a top-level champion, in parallel he also pursued a successful professional career.
Story 2 – Mathieu
The subject was 33 years old when he started his company. He started a micro-fund company for entrepreneurs with a view to democratising access to finance. He is of a mixed Vietnamese and French cultural background, born during the Vietnam war and abandoned by his mother. He was raised in an orphanage until he was adopted by a French family, who later started to mistreat him. He discovered faith, which became an essential element in his life and led him to get involved in social projects from his adolescence. This constitutes a key element of his resilience. He adopted a child himself, which represented a major event for him, and founded a family, which, to date, has four children, including one with a disability. He studied business. He held management positions in international companies before becoming an entrepreneur.
Story 3 –Yves
The subject created his company at the age of 54. It aims to prevent the risk of addiction in companies, in particular, alcoholism. He is self-taught (with no formal education), which is one of his greatest regrets. He started his working career as a labourer. He very quickly progressed to other activities and joined a multinational company, firstly as a salesperson before quickly climbing the ladder to become part of the top level of management in France. He turned to alcohol during his career, which would become a key element of his life. He lived his personal, professional and family life with intensity. He developed different forms of commitment, undertaking commercial activities in addition to his salaried position. He experienced a difficult company takeover, which ended in resounding failure. He lost everything he had and became an alcoholic, before starting on a painful process of healing, and as part of that momentum, he created his company.

## CODING AND ANALYSIS OF LIFE EXPERIENCES

The interviews supplied information through linguistic structures, which were a source of specific lexical choices and provided the “foundations” of the coding. Thus, we mapped out the discourse of each person, which allowed us to bring out the different concepts used throughout the analysis. Through this work we also created “life experience maps” that allowed us to visualise the different types of information relating to the resilience process. The design of our process puts into perspective the special role of starting a business within this experience map.

It is important to underline the role of the co-author in the coding and analysis of the life experiences as communicated by our interviewees. Since the trust established between the lead author and the participants was essential in order to gather information, the fact that the co-author had never met the three interviewees allowed him to bring an outside perspective and thus reduce the potential level of interpretation bias which might stem from a close relationship with the participants. This aligns with the approach adopted by Gioia and colleagues: one member of the research team embedded in the ground work and another bringing an outside perspective to the research (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013; Langley & Abdallah, 2011).

Thus, our analysis procedure was the subject of coding and double coding work carried out by both authors. We employed open coding and axial coding, which we adapted and simplified. At the first stage, we carried out simple coding, during which each author individually analysed each interview and carried out a first coding, moving between the literature review and the transcriptions. We then proceeded to a double coding, during which we looked at our first individual analyses in order to establish together the different categories to maintain and allowing us the follow up with a detailed structuring of the information contained in the life experience accounts.

We also established a chronology of the main events for each life story, identifying the context and the consequences of each event. We identified 47 critical events in Story 1, 92 critical events in Story 2 and 67 critical events in Story 3. This chronology of events was discussed and agreed upon with each participant. We analysed the conditions under which each event occurred, as well as the impact of each event on the person in terms of his evolution on a dynamic trajectory. This meticulous work corresponds to the suggestions of Van de Ven (2007) for research on longitudinal processes. This author suggests that the size of the sample in this kind of study should not be judged on the number of cases studied but above all by the number of events identified in the process of change affecting each case (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 212-213). Tables summing up in detail the critical events of each life story are available from the authors.

Tables 1 and 2 present a summary of the traumatic events experienced by the participants in their childhoods, the constituent elements of the first manifestations of their resilience, as well as the elements that were closest in time to the start of their entrepreneurial projects: training and professional experiences prior to entrepreneurship, age, date of creation and activity of the business. We note that research in the field of entrepreneurship has often focussed on these latter elements. For example, several studies have shown that the professional experience and knowledge acquired prior to starting a business have a significant effect on the intention to become an entrepreneur (Krueger, 1993) and on the identification of entrepreneurial opportunities (Shane, 2000). In fact, we find several indications of this in the life stories of our three entrepreneurs:

taking on responsibility and management positions, participating in professional or associative networks, commitments and taking initiative in different fields (sports, politics, associations, even entrepreneurial initiatives). However, these elements do not appear sufficient in explaining the nature of the entrepreneurial decisions of the three individuals. For example, there is nothing in the engineering training of Tomas (Story 1), or in his job as director of an IT department for a bank, that could entirely explain his decision to create a recruitment consultancy company for the recruitment of disabled persons. The identification of the entrepreneurial opportunity (if we wish to describe it in such a way) can only be understood if we take into account the fact that the individual concerned is himself disabled, and that he experienced different kinds of difficulties and discrimination with regard to his disability.

In addition, when we compare the life stories of each participant with the literature on resilience, it becomes clear that certain elements are often evoked as “professional or extra-professional experience prior to entrepreneurship”, which can in effect be constituent elements in the resilience process. This is the case with the strong and diverse forms of commitment demonstrated by the three entrepreneurs studied. Having listened to their stories and conducted a detailed analysis of them, we note that this commitment to action<sup>3</sup> can be interpreted as a search for meaning and a response, in a way, to difficult experiences lived throughout their lives to date.

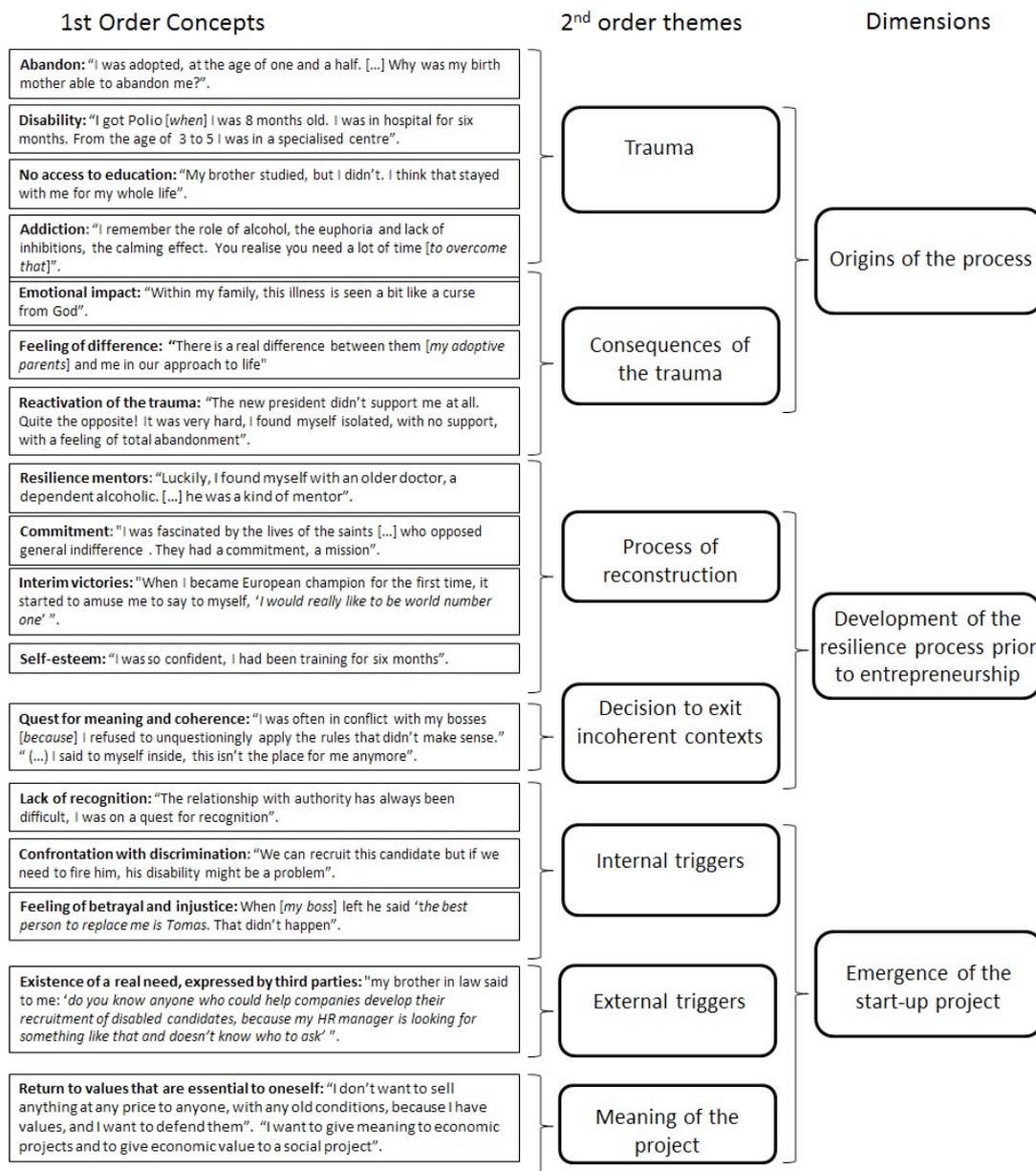
In the following sections we will go into further detail and discuss these points through a meticulous analysis of each life story studied. In light of our research question on the role of the resilience dynamic in triggering the decision to become an entrepreneur, we judged it relevant to make an attempt at establishing a model, because whilst Tables 1 and 2 may suggest a link between the decision to become an entrepreneur and the difficulties experienced, they do not make explicit the process of resilience underlying each story. In order to make this process clear, we adopt an approach similar to those used in studies employing grounded theory, ethnography and, more generally, qualitative research methods (Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark & Fugate, 2007; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Creed, DeJordy & Lok, 2010; Gioia, 1998; Gioia et al., 2013; Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006; Langlely & Abdallah, 2011; Van Maanen, 1979). Specifically, we include first order data (taken directly from verbatim passages) as well as second order data (from more abstract concepts that we developed through the transcription of our interviews). We therefore follow the approach adopted by Corley and Gioia (2004) and detailed by Gioia et al. (2013). Figure 1 below shows the structure of our data after coding, with verbatim passages showing our first order codes<sup>4</sup>. Appendix B supplies supplementary passages supporting the interpretation of our results, this time organised by second-order theme<sup>5</sup>.

3. Commitment is evoked here as commitment to oneself. Commitment pushes the individual towards a dynamic of future action. It is a multidimensional construct, according to the model of Meyer and Herscovitch (2001).

4. Creed et al. (2010) organise their data in a similar way, presenting verbatim extracts demonstrating each first-order code.

5. Corley & Gioia (2004) organise their data by second-order theme.

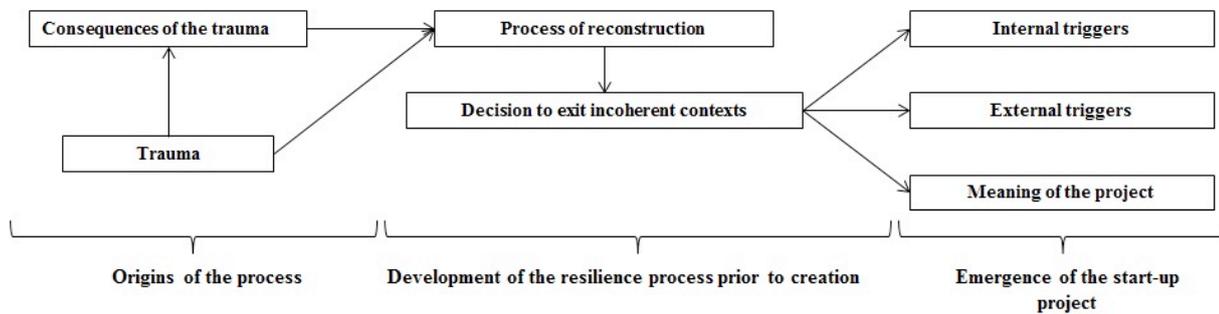
Figure 1. Structure of data after coding



## RESULTS

Using our double coding method explained in Figure 1 and the chronology of the principal life events of each entrepreneur, we constructed a model of the resilience process that contributes to triggering the decision to become an entrepreneur. This is presented in Figure 2 in order to offer a whole structure for the emergent theory (or intermediate theory, in the sense applied by David, 2004) that we then go on to develop. Table A2 of the appendix provides representative verbatim extracts for the main themes highlighted in Figures 1 and 2, in order to add supplementary data supporting our interpretation of the results.

**Figure 2.** Process of resilience contributing data supporting to triggering the entrepreneurship decision



The model that we present in Figure 2 is emergent as it is the result of our empirical study. In order to ensure clarity when reading the model, we have kept the second order themes and the dimensions featured in each stage of the process. As is the case with most intermediate theories, the arrows are there to suggest causality and a processional continuity requiring further study. In addition, the linear aspect of the model aims to simplify understanding and should not erase the numerous possible iterations and interactions which are elemental in feeding a complex living system. We present below an overview of the contribution of the resilience process to triggering the decision to become an entrepreneur, before giving detail on the constituent elements of each stage of this process.

The process begins with the appearance of a traumatic experience which generally occurs during the individual’s early childhood. The trauma is multidimensional: the original “wounds” are often reopened and the primary trauma can therefore be followed by secondary trauma. The original trauma creates an acquired vulnerability in the subject, which makes them particularly receptive to different signals that may be perceived throughout their lives. These different signals can then send the individual back, sometimes unconsciously, to the traumatic experience: this constitutes a “reactivation of the trauma” and takes place throughout the individual’s lifetime.

The traumatic experience leads to a number of consequences for the individual. Other than the reactivation of the trauma, the principal consequences of the trauma observed are an emotional impact and a feeling of difference. When the individual is confronted with a shock and experiences the trauma, he or she firstly puts in place different defence mechanisms in order to survive. The after-shock creates a series of sensitive and complex processes that are psychological, emotional, physical and relational. The emotional impact and feeling of difference are part of this, because the individual is affected (or even broken) and wounded in terms of his relationships with others. These complex and difficult relations play a role in the emergence and reinforcement of the feeling of difference, and can create discriminatory phenomena with regard to the individual. Each reactivation of the trauma sends the individual back to the emotional and relational configuration experienced at the time of the original trauma.

In the first instance, the trauma thus leads to a psychological disorganisation which the individual must deal with. Consequently, the person concerned starts and demands a process of reconstruction during which the ability required to overcome the trauma must be developed. This ability, a *sine qua non* when talking about a resilience process,

presupposes that certain essential criteria for the repair of the psychological system are met. This means resilience mentors, self-esteem, different forms of commitment and interim victories. These four elements tend to interact and contribute to re-establishing in the individual confidence in his or herself and others, and in life, which is essential in developing one's own resilience and overcoming trauma in a process of reconstruction.

Every critical event reported in our interviewees' life stories has an effect not just on the individual, in psychological, emotional and relational terms, but also on the subject's evolution dynamic, in terms of the search for meaning and coherence, which pushes them to discover new contexts, mobilise new momentum and develop new capabilities. This search for meaning leads the individual to make the decision to get out of incoherent contexts and thus triggers the emergence of a business start-up project. For the individual, the project provides meaning, as it emerges during a process whereby the individual is asking questions about his or her essential values. Finally, the decision to become an entrepreneur is triggered both by factors internal to the individual (such as a lack of recognition, a feeling of betrayal and unfairness, confrontation with discrimination) and external (such as the existence of a real demand, expressed by others).

The detail of these different elements will be discussed in the following section, with a distinction made between three phases of the process, namely, its origin, the development of the pre-entrepreneurship resilience process, and the emergence of the business start-up project. This distinction is rather didactic: in reality it is very difficult to identify with any exactitude the start and end of each phase of the process due to the numerous possible interactions. These three phases allow a better understanding of the process and remain coherent within a diachronic approach.

## ORIGINS OF THE RESILIENCE PROCESS

In order to fully understand the concept of resilience it is important to understand what triggers the resilience process itself. It originates in the "trauma" resulting from one or more experiences. It may have one cause or originate from a multitude of factors. In the three life stories we analysed, the original traumas are found in the childhoods of the individuals. In Story 1, Tomas<sup>6</sup> recounts these events as follows:

*"I was born in a family of modest social standing, my mother was a house wife, my father was a labourer, he had two jobs, he worked between 12 and 14 hours a day. [...] I was born in 61. I was born in January and should have been vaccinated in against Polio in July/August but I wasn't vaccinated, because the doctor thought it was too hot. At the beginning of September, I was infected with Polio. I was eight months old. I was in hospital for six months. From the age of three to five I was in a specialised centre. I have flashbacks to this period. [...] I had quite a lot of operations".*

Very clearly, these events have a very strong emotional impact on the individual. In Tomas' case, this impact was strengthened by the highly-charged emotional reaction within his family.

*"In the case of my family, this illness was a bit like a curse from God; my parents are practising Catholics, for them at the time it was a bit*

6. In order to protect the identity of those interviewed, all names have been modified.

*like: "we must have done something wrong to have a son who got an illness like that"*

This emotional impact is accompanied by a feeling of difference, which sets in and develops throughout the individual's life.

*When I was a teenager, I could still walk, I was with a friend, there was a girl he knew, she came over, he said to her: "this is Tomas", he bent over and put his two arms on my walking sticks. He said to the girl "see, if he didn't have those (indicating the sticks) he wouldn't be a bad catch!"*

The resilience process of Mathieu, in Story 2, also originated in the traumatic events of his childhood, in particular his birth in a country at war, being abandoned by his biological mother and adopted by a French family who mistreated him (see appendix 2).

In Story 3, the origin of the process was also connected to a difficult family situation, where an emotional impact and feeling of difference were also very present. With an alcoholic father and having been discriminated against in favour of his siblings, particularly following the birth of his younger brother, Yves had to face his mother not allowing him to go on to secondary school. This trauma marks the start of his developmental journey - he would later qualify himself as "self-taught".

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESILIENCE PROCESS PRIOR TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

As indicated in the literature review, resilience includes two essential dimensions: the occurrence of trauma (or confrontation with strong adversity) and the ability of the person to overcome the trauma. Certain factors seem to be particularly important and necessary to the construction of this ability: meeting/finding resilience mentors, commitment to action, interim victories and the re-conquest of self-esteem.

### *Resilience mentors*

The idea of the resilience mentor goes back to the idea of social support, an outstretched hand, goodwill, social connection. In order to reconstruct oneself it is essential to be able to forge links, trust others again and sometimes break a vicious circle of isolation. Every individual, child or adult, who has been damaged in a significant way can only have a balanced psychological life again through exterior supports. Individuals need "affectionate nourishment" (Cyrulnik, 2000) allowing them to reboot their lives and their mind-set. What cannot be treated through the intrapsychic must be able to be dealt with in part through the interactional. Resilience mentors quite naturally include family members in the first instance, those with whom the individual who has experienced a psychological aggression has a strong emotional relationship. When the family is lacking, or a cause of the trauma, we have noted that individuals have the ability to look for other connections and supports which can "nourish" them. For example, Mathieu expresses the crucial importance of meeting others and help from others in particularly difficult times:

*"The people I've met along the way have all helped me at one point or another. I met a chaplain at a time when I was contemplating suicide. I was not well at all... He understood what was happening immediately. He said "No, don't do that, your life is precious."*

Tomas also attests to the importance of resilience mentors in his childhood, talking about the primary school teacher who “did everything she could to make sure that things went as well as possible” at school. Then, as an adult, he had support from the Managing Director of the company he worked for in order to train and take part in the 1992 Paralympic Games.

Yves, as someone who is self-taught, also recognises the importance of resilience mentors. Firstly, in the personal treatment he was given by the company he worked for for a long part of his life and which gave him the training that he hadn't been able to gain via an academic pathway, then, at Alcoholics Anonymous. So the resilience mentor can be both an institution as well as a physical person, whatever its place, status or position.

#### *Commitment to action*

In the resilience process that we've analysed, the individual is constantly searching for meaning and wants to commit. Each person shows a form of commitment which seems to be a response to the nature of the trauma experienced. Thus, with his physical disability and in response to the discrimination experienced, Tomas developed a commitment to sports which led him to become a Paralympic Champion and the world number one in table tennis. As for Yves, in his quest for understanding and perhaps recognition, he developed an intense political commitment. Mathieu developed a religious commitment far removed from that of his adoptive family. This commitment for him symbolises the acceptance of difference, in contrast to the total refusal of this by his parents.

*"As a child, I was fascinated by the lives of the saints, religious people, missionaries, Sister Emmanuelle, St. Francis of Assisi, who opposed general indifference. I was fascinated by the commitments they made, how they went further than themselves. The opposite to how my parents' faith manifested itself."*

These different forms of commitment are in fact a source of diverse experiences and major interactions in the process of self-reconstruction. They are also an important source of learning.

#### *Interim victories*

In the quest for reconstruction and repair of the psychological system, an individual who has experienced trauma commits, often with the help of a resilience mentor, to actions marked by victories. These small and large victories contribute to the reconstruction of self-esteem and are often perceived as bridges to other achievements. Each victory gives the individual the desire to go further, do better and fix new objectives. The sports activities of Tomas demonstrate this:

*"When I became European champion for the first time, it started to amuse me to say to myself, "I would really like to be world number one". The idea effectively became reality I think in Seoul when I became Olympic champion, I said to myself "If I was able to become Olympic champion that means I'm able to be the world number one". [...] I went to see my manager and said "I would like to train for the Barcelona games as best as I can, in order to become Paralympic champion and world number one". That was my objective in sport".*

Interim victories vary in nature and occur in the different spheres of an individual's life. For Tomas, the birth of his son is an illustration of this:

"The competition in sport is an achievement. The birth of a baby is a beautiful beginning. These feelings are comparable in terms of their intensity. Although having child is much more important than having a title! "

For Mathieu, it was in the academic and school sphere that he experienced a few failures and some interim victories which he perceives to be amongst the most significant in his life. These victories seem to have helped him to "find the right path".

For Yves, the first victories took place in his professional life, which he started quite young. He describes them as his "first creations".

#### The re-conquest of self-esteem

In the reconstruction dynamic of the psychic apparatus specific to the resilience process, work on self-esteem is fundamental (Cyrulnik & Duval, 2006). Resilience mentors, various forms of commitment and interim victories seem to contribute to this considerably. Tomas illustrates this again in relation to his high-level sporting career:

*"I played matches, I felt untouchable, I remember. (I said to myself) "anything could happen but I can't lose". You feel like you're invulnerable, it's psychological, of course you are vulnerable".*

Tomas therefore clearly evokes the particular feeling of the state of "grace" present when an individual feels his own level of excellence within. The theme of invulnerability has been at the centre of theoretical debates on resilience and seems to be connected to the feeling of self-efficacy. Indeed, sport was a key factor in Tomas' resilience process, both in reinforcing his image, his self-esteem and his legitimacy.

The re-conquest of self-esteem is not just symbolic. Interim victories are real victories, with tangible results. For example, the high-level sports achievements of Tomas contribute to the legitimacy of his company in its mission to promote the integration of disabled people into the world of work. In turn, Mathieu explains that:

*"The fact that I was trained in IMD and at INSEAD [two significant victories for the individual] doesn't just increase self-confidence, it gives access to networks, to people with high levels of skill, in very high places".*

Feeling victorious, or even invulnerable, does not necessarily imply a blind optimism or excessive self-confidence. In fact, our three interviewees evoke "luck" to explain in part the conditions of their success. This evocation of luck is the expression of a rather positive world view, which is quite common in people who have entered into a resilience process (Cyrulnik, 2002; Cyrulnik & Duval, 2006; Werner et Smith, 1982). Tomas does it explicitly in relation to his sports performance. Mathieu also expresses this relationship with luck as being part of the reason for his desire to help others. He highlights this several times, particularly in relation to his trip to Vietnam as an adult.

*"The trip to Vietnam was a sort of "return to sender" of what I had received, to say to myself that I was lucky to avoid communism, to*

*be well-educated, to have a recognised qualification, and so to use this luck by giving it to others in Vietnam".*

Yves also evokes luck in relation to his life journey. He does it in two relatively distinct ways. The first by using the most common meaning of the word luck: he evokes being lucky to have received management training in a large company, being lucky to have had contact with important political figures, lucky to have met Alcoholics Anonymous. The second in the context of an idea of "protection" that has always been with him and prevented him from complete destruction of his psychic apparatus.

*"Something, which has been a constant throughout my life, I knew when I was on the edge, at the limit, that there was a force that always stopped me before total destruction, in all areas of life, it's a bit like the presence of a kind of angel or intuition and perhaps my own luck".*

The quest for meaning and coherence

Throughout their lives, the entrepreneurs we interviewed for this study were looking for meaning and a professional project that would be coherent with themselves. Their experiences prior to entrepreneurship led them into confrontation with the incoherences of the organisations they were involved with. These confrontations were often a source of reactivation of the trauma they had known. For example, in Story 1, Tomas tells us about the discovery of a discriminatory evaluation made when he was taken on at the company he worked for:

*"I went to look at my personal file [...]. There were two things written: "Limited intelligence but solid good sense". Just that, it has a strange effect! [...] The second thing was: "We can recruit this candidate, but be careful if we need to fire him, his disability might be a problem". [...] When you read things like that, it feels strange..."*

Tomas talks about both the anger and the feeling of humiliation experienced in the face of discrimination due to a disability. This type of event has an important symbolic impact in the subject's consciousness and acts as a reactivation of trauma. At each reactivation of the trauma, the individual is called by the dissonance between himself and the situations encountered. He then asks himself questions about where his choices are leading. In the case of Tomas, the incoherences of the organisation that employed him and the successive reactivations of the original trauma led him to the conclusion that he no longer felt that "his place" was in the company.

*"When [my boss] left he said "the best person to replace me is Tomas". That didn't happen. [...] A bit later there was another similar opportunity. So I sent an e-mail to say that I was interested in the post. I had no reply, until the day I learnt that someone else had been appointed [...] I almost felt like it was the end... One day someone said: 'they had a hard time finding someone, they offered it to everyone'. I said to myself "this is not the place for me any more!"*

These passages show the superposition of different sorts of events, which will lead to the emergence of an idea for a business start-up project and the decision to become an entrepreneur: a feeling of betrayal, lack of recognition, discrimination in relation to a disability, as well as conflict with

the values of the company the individual works for, particularly concerning the incoherences in management practice. The quest for meaning and coherence that is part of the resilience process led Tomas to the idea of creating his own company.

In Story 2, Mathieu's life story is marked by conflicts with authority and a very sensitive relationship with the hierarchy. This is directly connected to the power struggle in his family, which contributed to his developing a rebellious attitude in order to face the incomprehension, violence, refusal of difference and poor treatment by the family. This independent mind-set, allied with the quest for meaning, contributed to the development of his position in relation to leaving the company he worked for before becoming an entrepreneur. One particular trigger was when there was an organisational change leading to a difficult situation and reactivation of his original trauma.

*"The manager, with whom I had a good connection, took me on straightaway for a mission representing French businesses to official organisations and businesses in Vietnam. And I felt that I was in harmony. But he was fired while the mission was in progress and I was far away. The new president didn't agree with the mission, he stopped everything, he didn't support me at all. [...] I found myself isolated, with no support, no means, with a feeling of total abandonment."*

Thus the individual evokes a key moment for him, an essential part of the quest to find himself, because it was a question of going back to the country of his birth and also of taking on a mission in which he played the role of messenger, of "ambassador" between two worlds. In this mission, he found himself with no support and talks openly of "abandonment", which in effect constitutes a reactivation of trauma. It is interesting to see that later, he built his company on the idea of "building a bridge between two worlds".

In Story 3, we were able to identify two stages in the entrepreneurial initiative of Yves, who experienced two approaches and two very different projects. The first stage was characterised by a takeover with a certain number of risk factors ending in an extremely violent failure. This failure provoked a reactivation of the original trauma and led to his finding solace in alcohol, which is also a trauma. Alcohol addiction, with its violent effects, marked the individual's deepest fall and subsequently triggered the beginning of his "resurrection", as we have seen, with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous. In fact, when he lost the first company and turned to alcohol, his father died and there was a feeling of total failure, reinforced by the humiliation with regard to previous partners. So the creation of his own company seemed like an opportunity for the individual to reconstruct himself.

*"I was wearing virtual hand-cuffs, I spent 10 years in isolation, I wasn't likely to go far, every night I went back to my cell. [...] I didn't exist; I didn't exist any more. I had to completely reconstruct myself individually and socially. The role of (the company created) allowed me to take back my place in society, to get back my self-esteem, a restoration of the image and installation of the image of (the company created), that I took back, where I took back my place again"*.

## EMERGENCE OF THE BUSINESS START-UP PROJECT

The idea of starting a company therefore appeared for our interviewees as a way of getting away from incoherence and an opportunity to build a professional project more in tune with the individual's personal values. Incoherence, as we have seen, is often linked to the individual's professional situation and – particularly to his relationship with the organisations within which he has evolved. For example, in Story 1, Tomas was confronted with the accumulation of a series of tangible signs that had a strong symbolic dimension and a strong internal impact on him, leading him to the conclusion that his place was no longer within the company. These tangible signs included: discrimination (not open, but present) in relation to his disability, the chance discovery of this discrimination, the refusal to be considered for a new position with no explanation, the confrontation of injustice and incoherence with regard to the management practices during the company's restructuring. Finally, all these signs of incoherence and their accumulation would contribute to a first decision to get out of the current situation and to the emergence of the idea of creating his own company.

The emergence process for the idea of entrepreneurship is thus composed of a host of internal triggers, amongst which we have notably identified the lack of recognition, confrontation with discrimination, and the feeling of betrayal and injustice. Obviously, these internal triggers are connected to the reactivation of trauma, to the emotional impact resulting from it, the feeling of difference, as well as to self-esteem and the desire to commit to a project with meaning. The company start-up project seems to emerge during a process whereby the individual is looking not just to get away from situational incoherences, but also to get back to what is essential to him. In the case of Tomas:

*"The fact of wanting to affirm difference, that difference is a source of wealth, is something that impacts a business, (and) me".*

This aspect in no way excludes the fact that the process can also be triggered by the gradual realisation that there is a real demand, expressed by third parties. It often takes the form of an external trigger to the individual, a trigger that goes beyond the incoherence experienced and which allows the individual to see an entrepreneurship opportunity that is coherent with oneself.

*"Something clicked and it was quite funny. [...] my brother in law said to me: 'do you know anyone who could help companies develop their recruitment of disabled candidates, because my HR manager is looking for something like that and doesn't know who to ask'".*

Thus, the emerging start-up project is closely connected to the individual's personal trajectory and in tune with their personal values. In the case of Mathieu, that translated through a networking project between investors and budding entrepreneurs, which corresponded to his desire to contribute to society, have a project, and particularly to link two different worlds in order to help the less fortunate.

*"Today, I find the same thing as I experienced on my journey, being between two worlds. [...] The point of the project is to allow entrepreneurs who have good ideas to realise their ideas and to*

*allow them to avoid failure, for those who haven't been able to access these kinds of people".*

The company created by Tomas also reflects his life journey. His main mission is to contribute to the professional and social integration of disabled people. Thus, it gives meaning, in a very concrete way, to the feeling of difference he experienced throughout his life. In Tomas' project we find a desire, similarly felt by Mathieu, to help others and balance the economic and human aspects of the professional world: "business cannot discount humanity".

This is also shared by Yves, whose company aims to take away the taboo surrounding addictions (mainly alcoholism) and to improve health and well-being at work. Thus, for the three entrepreneurs we interviewed, the businesses they created reflect not just the life experiences of their creators, but also an opportunity to reconstruct their identity by building projects in tune with their deepest values and beliefs.

## DISCUSSION

From our empirical data we have described the resilience process as a complex system where the individual, confronted with one (or more) traumatic event(s), begins by putting in place a host of protection, and then reconstruction mechanisms. The first help the individual to make his way in life whilst rendering him particularly sensitive to environment signals that may reactivate the trauma experienced. The second turns him towards the future. In this process, meeting with resilience mentors, commitment to various forms of action and initiatives, interim victories and reconstruction of self-esteem, play an essential role for the subtle repair of the individual's psychic apparatus. Finally, the quest for meaning and coherence contributes to highlighting the existing gulfs between the personal values of the individual and the contexts and practices with which he is confronted. In the resilience process, sensitivity to incoherence plays an important role: it manifests itself through a quest for meaning leading the subjects little by little to find a way out of the contexts that no longer offer coherence and sufficient meaning to be, and act, in harmony with oneself. The process of reconstruction of the person leads them to the decision to leave the incoherent context behind and contributes to the emergence of a business start-up project.

Thus, to the question "what role can the resilience dynamic play in triggering the decision to become an entrepreneur?", our study gives a nuanced response. On the one hand, the analysis of the three life trajectories that we studied suggests that several constituent elements of a resilience process contribute to triggering a future entrepreneurial initiative. Resilience mentors lay the first stones for the construction of a social support network for the future entrepreneur. The different forms of commitment are a source of experience and learning. Interim victories strengthen self-esteem and consequently the confidence required to become an entrepreneur one day. Finally, the quest for meaning and coherence highlights the situational incoherence that triggers new life choices. In this way, the resilience dynamic plays a fundamental role in triggering the decision to become an entrepreneur and in the whole journey leading up to that decision. It also contributes to giving meaning to the entrepreneurial project by focussing attention of the individual on their

essential values and the problems connected to the traumas they experienced.

On the other hand, the analysis of the three life journeys studied also shows the importance of factors external to the individual in the triggering of the entrepreneurship decision. Examples include the conversation between Tomas and his brother in law, the change of the president in the organisation where Mathieu was working, or the meetings at Alcoholics Anonymous attended by Yves. It is here that the concept of displacement advanced by Shapero takes on its full meaning as an “exogenous” event in the individual’s life. The “internal” displacement remains, however, shaped by the resilience dynamic in the three life journeys studied.

Thus, our study shows that a resilience dynamic can play an important role in triggering the decision to become an entrepreneur and that this in no way excludes other factors that may contribute to this decision, including factors external to the individual. Resilience is therefore not a necessary or sufficient condition to trigger the entrepreneurship decision. However, the components of the resilience dynamic strengthen the elements often associated with starting a company, such as self-confidence, building a social support network, the search for coherence and commitment to action. Bruyat reminds us in his thesis that the creation of a company is not “*a process initiated by one or more causes that are necessary and sufficient, or by necessary causes (which would be identifiable), but by a host of tangled causalities inscribed in a systemic dynamic*” (1993, p. 103-104). Our study suggests that resilience, being itself a systemic dynamic, can be part of the host of tangled causalities that push certain individuals towards entrepreneurship.

## ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

### *Study of resilience in entrepreneurship*

Research relating to the role of resilience in entrepreneurship have been highly influenced by the area of positive psychology (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001, 2003) and have employed the notion of resilience above all as a quality needed to respond to a difficult context (Bullough & Renko, 2013; Bullough et al., 2014) and to bounce back when faced with the failure of an entrepreneurial initiative (Hayward et al., 2010 ; Shepherd, 2003; Shepherd et al., 2011). Few works in the field have approached resilience in the context of “life in general” and, to our knowledge, no study has looked at the life stories of entrepreneurs in order to examine resilience as a process. This article contributes to correcting this deficit. It is an important contribution that should be pursued further, since whilst a qualifier similar to a character trait may be difficult to modify, a process can be more easily influenced once its key elements are understood. Examining resilience as a process in the lives of certain entrepreneurs can therefore highlight a number of elements relating to the nature of their motivations, the emergence of their projects, as well as their persistence in the face of adversity.

Specifically, our study reveals that in the resilience process, positive emotions are not immediately a given, they emerge over the course of a process of post-traumatic disengagement and are not present *ex-nihilo*. They are the fruit of different interactions, in particular with resilience mentors. They are the consequence of work on the psychic apparatus, which needs to restore itself and find meaning even in catastrophic circumstances. Finally, positive emotions, such as self-confidence, seem to emerge over the course of a journey that mixes reactivations of the trauma and interim victories, commitment to action and the quest for coherence. All

of these components of the resilience process encourage an internal displacement in the individual towards entrepreneurship, thus contributing to the intersection of overlapping causalities that may trigger the entrepreneurship decision.

Our approach to resilience as a process joins up with the research thread in the field of Psychology looking at the intrapsychic dimension of resilience and interactions with the environment as a support to the dynamic itself (Anaut, 2005; Cyrulnik & Duval, 2006; Lecomte et al., 2005). In Management literature, our study adds to the body of research evoking the resilience dynamic in various contexts, such as in social integration (Brasseur, 2009), family businesses (Bégin & Chabaud, 2010), companies going through periods of crisis (Altintas & Royer, 2009), and the resilient trajectory of whistle-blowers (Charreire Petit & Cusin, 2013). Finally, in the field of Entrepreneurship, our study joins the narrative approach put forward by Gartner (2007) in order to increase awareness of “entrepreneurial stories”. In so doing, we widen the body of literature on resilience in entrepreneurship, moving the focus from resilience as a quality of the entrepreneur in a difficult situation towards a process-related view in which the resilience dynamic can contribute not only to increasing the intention to become an entrepreneur, but also to actually becoming one.

#### The study of the decision to become an entrepreneur

This study contributes to research on the decision to become an entrepreneur by bringing in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to construct an intermediate theory (David, 2004) on the role of the resilience dynamic in triggering this decision. We therefore extend the modelling of the entrepreneurial process put forward by Bruyat (1993). This modelling takes into account the concept of displacement suggested by Shapero (1975) and allows quite a wide conception, including values, preferences, characteristics and individual experiences, to be interpreted as part of the notion of perceived instantaneous strategic configuration by the creator. However, Bruyat (1993) doesn't draw on the concept of resilience and does not enter into a systematic analysis of the life journeys of entrepreneurs. His observations on the quest for meaning and coherence undertaken by a good number of entrepreneurs remains, nonetheless in tune with ours. The search for coherence between the project and the individual, which is at the centre of Bruyat's (1993) thesis, largely explains the decision of individuals that we interviewed.

Our study also contributes to updating and adding depth to the concept of displacement (Shapero, 1975, 1981; Shapero & Sokol, 1982), which has been gradually left aside by other works on entrepreneurial intentions. As formulated by Shapero, this concept remains limited to critical situations and events that directly trigger the decision to become an entrepreneur. The hidden, internal side of displacement has been ignored. Yet this complex dimension that is difficult to access seems to us to be essential in explaining the real reason for taking entrepreneurial action.

Thus, the creation of a business, which is the tangible result, is as much determined by exogenous variables that influence the individual's decisions as by variables that are internal to the individual. Our study shows that the trigger does come from events that are elements of life experience. The power of these events to trigger entrepreneurship resides in the fact that they resonate with salient times in the individual's life journey. These events fuel the individual's attitudes and motivation, and make possible the conscious decision to choose entrepreneurship.

By focussing on the triggering of the decision to choose entrepreneurship and the resilience process preceding this decision, our study also brings a specific contribution to the field of study looking at entrepreneurship decision-making. Despite a certain lack of structure in this field of research (Dubard Barbosa, 2014; Shepherd, Williams & Patzelt, 2015), due in particular to the profusion of empirical studies, we note that studies relating to the decision to choose entrepreneurship tend to adopt either a socio-economic approach identifying “push” and “pull” factors in this decision (Delmar & Wennberg, 2010; Thornton, 1999), or an approach based on cognitive psychology focussing on concepts such as heuristics and cognitive bias, mental representations and risk perception, among others (Baron, 2004; Busenitz & Barney, 1997; Dubard Barbosa, 2008; Grégoire, Corbett & McMullen, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2007). In this latter approach, resilience is seen as a positive quality in entrepreneurs, similar to a character trait (Bullough et al., 2014; Hayward et al., 2010). Our study offers an alternative explanation for the decision to become an entrepreneur, based on a process-related view of resilience.

#### MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Our study suggests that understanding the resilience process as a way of decoding individuals’ reactions in the face of significant and symbolic life events can be a key to understanding their decision to choose entrepreneurship. This study may have interesting implications regarding support for those with start-up projects. More specifically, incubator workers and experts who adopt an educative approach to support entrepreneurship (Fourcade & Krichewsky, 2014; Vial & Caparros-Mencacci, 2007) can benefit from information gathering and analysis in relation to life stories of potential entrepreneurs in order to better understand their motivations and ways of interacting with others. From such analysis, the support worker can identify areas for improvement in the support relationship as well as for the relations of the future entrepreneur with different stakeholders in the new business.

Despite the different constraints of entrepreneur support systems (Duquenne, 2014), a number of actors from the academic and professional spheres agree that the individual should be at the centre of the support system (Fourcade & Krichewsky, 2014; Mitrano-Méda & Véran, 2014; St-Jean & Audet, 2009; Vial & Caparros-Mencacci, 2007). This approach brings to the fore the relational aspects of individuals as well as the need for continual learning of the attitudes, methods and skills that need to be used both by the support worker and the would-be entrepreneur. Support for those going through a resilience process may need very particular attention regarding these relational aspects as well as deeper reflection on the values and practices that the would-be entrepreneur wishes to integrate into the start-up project.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Our work presents limitations that should be taken into account in interpreting our results and our “intermediate theory” (David, 2004), as well as in carrying out future research into resilience in entrepreneurship. Most of these limitations are connected to the nature of our empirical work.

Firstly, we studied three life stories that could be characterised as “revealing” (Gioia et al., 2013), in particular due to the presence of especially intense original traumatic experiences. This approach is interesting in order to generate intermediate theories in an inductive way

(Eisenhardt, 1989; Gioia et al., 2013; Langley & Abdallah, 2011). Nonetheless, this methodological choice makes it difficult to project generalisations from the results to a larger population of entrepreneurs or individuals who have not experienced trauma or who have experienced different kinds of trauma. We suggest that the presence of particularly deep traumatic “wounds” plays an “amplifying effect” which allows one to better understand the mechanisms of human functioning. This hypothesis constitutes an interesting research area for the future.

The small number of cases studied is a limitation and it would be interesting to be able to look at a wider number of life stories. However, the diachronic and synchronic processing of the testimonials requires significant resources which makes a larger case study difficult. In our study, in order to ensure an in-depth analysis of the life stories we recorded, and to afford them greater attention over the course of the study, it was not realistic to include more testimonials. As a reminder, we analysed a total of 206 critical events from the three life stories. Each story shows the process of change experienced by the subject over time. In this type of process-related research, the number of events analysed is a more relevant indicator than the number of cases for inferring the validity and reliability of the results (Van de Ven, 2007).

The closeness of the lead author to the interviewees could be a source of bias, particularly with regard to the intervention of the subjectivity of the researcher in the interpretation of the data collected. We planned our research in such a way as to reduce this potential bias. Firstly, we suggested proofreading of transcriptions and a second listening of the recorded interviews for each entrepreneur in order to have a double confirmation from them. Subsequently, we also involved them in certain stages of the validation of the data processing (notably with regard to the validation of critical events). Finally, we carried out a double coding of the life stories, which allowed the co-author to compare his analysis of the stories with the lead author’s interpretations. We would also underline the fact that the co-author had no contact with the interviewees.

The biographical approach that we adopted is not without its limitations either. On the one hand, it allowed us to think about the events and the temporality of a life journey in a different way. “*The analysis of the life stories allows an understanding of the influence of the multiple repertoires of action plans incorporated and interiorised by the subject through the course of their social experiences, whilst respecting the improbable character of intentionality or conscious strategy*” (Lahire, 1998 in Pailot, 2003, p. 23). On the other hand, the biographical method can be considered limited in its ability to realise the real role of the unconscious in the expression of life stories. These develop, by definition, in the rationality of the discourse. Although personal stories “*are born of a real attachment to the world, in what life does, passions, desires, ideas, conceptual systems*” and may be “*as much efforts to grasp the confusion and complexity of the human condition*” (Josselson, 1998, p. 896), they are used as “*a means by which both subjects and researchers form our understandings and grasp the meaning.*” (p. 896-897). As a result, the analysis of life stories remains limited in its approach to unconscious processes by the same qualities that make it an excellent method for studying individual trajectories, critical events in a life journey, decisions and their contexts and, lastly, “the complexity of the human condition”.

In view of the limitations discussed here, our study does not allow us to generalise a direct causality between the resilience process and the triggering of a “virtuous” entrepreneurial process for the individual. The three life trajectories we studied simply show that the resilience dynamic

can contribute to triggering the decision to become an entrepreneur. The fact that the three entrepreneurs interviewed state that they have found coherence and personal achievement in their business start-up projects cannot be generalised to other entrepreneurs and should not be interpreted as a definitive result. The link between the resilience process and entrepreneurship can be virtuous at a given moment, and it can also be precarious, since creating a business is an interim victory that can transform into defeat and even trauma, depending on the social, economic and psychological conditions of its evolution<sup>7</sup>. As the Portuguese writer and Nobel Prize winner for literature, José Saramago, has stated: “*What is bad about victories is that they are not definitive. What is good about defeats is that they are not definitive either*”.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH PATHWAYS

An open dialogue between the concepts of resilience and entrepreneurship has been suggested by Bernard (2008). Our study offers several research pathways in this direction, both on a “macro” level (comparing different processes and examining different phases of the process) and a “micro” level (by further developing the concepts raised).

On a more general level, studying the conditions for “success” of the resilience process remains a very pertinent question in the field of Psychology. This question can be developed in two ways in the field of entrepreneurship. Firstly, with regard to the decision to choose entrepreneurship, it would be interesting to explore the conditions under which different resilience processes lead or do not lead to starting a business. To do so, a longitudinal study of a panel of individuals larger than ours would be required, individuals identified as being at an earlier stage of their life journey and followed preferably from childhood, as in the pioneering work of Werner and colleagues (Werner et al., 1971; Werner & Smith, 1982).

Secondly, it would be interesting to examine the conditions under which the resilience process contributes to the success of an entrepreneurial project. With this approach, it would be necessary to question the role of the resilience dynamic following the decision to choose entrepreneurship, particularly concerning the development of the new business, its growth, its takeover or closure. Several studies have focussed on the notion of resilience as the ability of the entrepreneur to bounce back after failure (Hayward et al., 2010; Shepherd, 2003; Shepherd et al., 2011), to persist in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunity (Holland & Shepherd, 2011), or to weather environmental crises (Davidsson & Gordon, 2016; Essen et al., 2015) and natural catastrophes (Danes et al., 2009). However, to our knowledge there are no studies on the role that different components of resilience could play on decisions relating to growth or termination of a company, or even on the evolution of the entrepreneurial project. Our study shows that the resilience dynamic plays an important role in triggering the decision to become an entrepreneur and in defining the direction of the entrepreneurial project beforehand, through a quest for meaning and coherence. It would be interesting to study how this quest could influence the evolution of companies set up.

On a more micro level, our study demonstrates a series of first and second order concepts that can supply the vocabulary to discuss resilience in entrepreneurship more easily. Future research might explore this further in order to create a “grammar guide”. For example, the concept of quest for meaning and coherence has a strong explanatory potential, since it refers to a driving force to action in those people we interviewed. The links

7. We would like to thank one of the anonymous evaluators of M@n@gement for having drawn our attention to this point.

between a quest for meaning, process of self-reconstruction, decision to break out of incoherent contexts and the emergence of the start-up project, could be further developed. Similarly, the role of internal and external triggers, as well as their link to the project's creation of meaning, could be explored further. Our study therefore provides an intermediate theory, a vocabulary, a range of interconnected concepts and an integration model with the aim of shining new light on the resilience dynamic and its role in triggering the decision to choose entrepreneurship. Exploring the concepts developed, adding to the theory put forward or even criticising it by focussing on different parts of the model, all constitute research pathways that may increase our knowledge of resilience in entrepreneurship and our ability to discuss it and influence it, or support it through entrepreneurship mentoring and support services.

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## APPENDIX A. Different approaches to the concept of resilience in Entrepreneurship

Authors	Use of the concept of resilience in Entrepreneurship	Approach	
Ayala Calvo & Manzano-Garcia (2010)	Resilience is a dimension of the entrepreneur's human capital, in the same way as concepts of locus of control and need for achievement.	Resilience as a trait, quality or skill.	
Ayala Calvo & Manzano-Garcia (2014) Manzano-Garcia & Ayala Calvo (2013)	Resilience is a quality of entrepreneurs. The authors distinguish three dimensions of resilience: hardiness, the ability to find resources and optimism. They find that these three dimensions contribute to the success of the entrepreneur.		
Dewald & Bowen (2010)	Organisational resilience is put forward as a cognitive framework and seen as an organisational capacity to adopt new routines when faced with threats and opportunities created by innovation.		
Duening (2010)	Resilience is put forward as one of five new cognitive talents recognised in entrepreneurs to be developed in education and entrepreneurship.		
Drnovsek, Örtqvist, & Wincent (2010)	Resilience is indirectly evoked by the concept of coping as the ability to face heightened stress and generative of performance and well-being.		
Hayward et al. (2010)	Resilience is a positive quality associated with an entrepreneur's confidence and ability to rebound and create new companies after a failure. The writers distinguish three types of resilience: emotional, social and financial.		
Ngah & Salleh (2015)	Resilience is implicitly suggested as a characteristic linked to emotional intelligence and the innovative abilities of entrepreneurs.		
Shigley (2010)	Resilience corresponds to a resistance skill and is an entrepreneurial quality like optimism, sense of autonomy and tolerance of risks.		
Branzei & Abdelnour (2010)	The authors observe the emergence of entrepreneurial activities in contexts of extreme adversity, such as terrorism. Resilience plays a role in resistance to conditions of adversity and has a positive influence on the revenue of entrepreneurs.		Resilience as a response to difficult context or events.
Chakravorti (2010)	The author evokes resilience indirectly, placing the accent on the fact that difficult environments offer opportunities for entrepreneurs.		
Dahles & Susilowati (2015) Dawley, Pike, & Tomaney (2010) Williams & Vorley (2014)	The authors focus on the concept of economic resilience, as the ability of regions and communities to bounce back after recessions and economic shocks, natural disasters or political crises.		
Holland & Shepherd (2011)	Resilience is indirectly evoked through the decision to persist in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunity in a context of adversity.		
Krueger & Brazeal (1994)	Resilience is associated with the concept of entrepreneurial potential and seen as dependent on a "nourishing" environment in terms of social and cultural support and support for information, knowledge and resources.		
Shapero (1975, 1981) Shapero & Sokol (1982)	The concept of displacement following a traumatic event is put forward as an element of moving to the entrepreneurship act. Resilience is implied in the energy of displacement. Economic resilience following a difficult event depends on an environment that is socially, culturally and materially supportive.		
Bullough & Renko (2013) Bullough, Renko, & Myatt (2014)	Resilience is the ability to continue to live after adversity. The authors examine the effect of the ability on the intention to become an entrepreneur in Afghanistan and the United States.		
Danes et al. (2009)	Resilience is approached as a family characteristic for facing natural catastrophes.		
Davidsson & Gordon (2016)	The authors analyse the response from a sample of budding entrepreneurs in Australia facing the macro-economic crisis of 2008-2009. They note that it did not have a direct effect on the behaviour of entrepreneurs, but did not find any signs of creative resilience in their sample, suggesting that their persistence could be explained by other factors.		
Essen, Strike, Carney, & Sapp (2015)	Resilience is approached as a characteristic of family businesses allowing them to get through the macro-economic crisis whilst maintaining their commitments to employees.		

## APPENDIX B. Supplementary data supporting the interpretation of results

Theme	Representative quotes
Origins of the process	
Traumatic experience	<p>"I was adopted when I was one and a half [...] I discovered resilience myself when I adopted a little boy and took an interest in adoption and those who have been adopted. That's when I understood the concept of resilience and that today there is a very clear link for me with what I am doing professionally. [...] I was born in Vietnam in 1973, during the war, and I left Vietnam in 1975. When I read up on adoption in relation to my son, I understood things about my own adoption and what is known as the trauma of abandonment." (Mathieu, Story 2)</p> <p>"First of all, I didn't choose my life [...] When my younger brother was born, my mother pushed me away from the family and my brother. I spent long periods far away from home, and all my holidays without my parents or my brother [...] There was a difference between my brother and I, he went on to study, I didn't. I think that stayed with me my whole life. My mother said to me one day <i>'your brother is more intelligent than you are, that's why he's studying'</i>" (Yves, Story 3)</p>
Consequences of trauma	<p>"There is a real difference between them (my adoptive parents) and me in terms of our attitude. It caused many conflicts. I lived with complete refusal of my difference. [...] In Vietnam, there is a very natural view of things that here, in the environment I arrived in, were very different [...] All that I took as a refusal of difference." (Mathieu, Story 2)</p>
Development of the resilience process prior to entrepreneurship	
Process of reconstruction	
Resilience mentors	<p>"The company gave me an education that society, and my family, did not give me. It was the company that trained me." (Yves, Story 3)</p> <p>"I was reborn there on the 26<sup>th</sup> January. There was a meeting at Alcoholics Anonymous [...] At this meeting I met the person who would take part in starting my business, who supported me for a long time and opened doors for me" (Yves, Story 3)</p> <p>"[In order to create my company] I had to work hard to pass my DU (university diploma) with the administration of the hospitals because there was no system of validating experience. [...] Luckily, I found myself with an older doctor, a dependent alcoholic. He had lost everything. He was a kind of mentor who allowed me to pass my DU." (Yves, Story 3)</p>
Commitment	<p>"I learned about being a politician from P.M. (a well-known politician), I learned a lot. I went through some very intense times. [...] I did the European elections. I was a campaign manager." (Yves, Story 3)</p>
Interim victories	<p>"At that time the best option was the "S" science studies pathway. They made me take the S option, I didn't really want that but it was a bit forced on me. My brother had done that, my sister had done it, so I had to do it! In fact, I made a mistake and at the end of the first year I was asking myself questions [...] [Finally] I finished in economics and did really well. I had found the right pathway, I knew the economics option was the right one for me." (Mathieu, Story 2)</p> <p>"I was 17 and a half, 18. [...] I already wanted out of the situation [labouring]. I found myself work, it was me who found a job. I joined a company where I could use the knowledge I had in electricity in a research unit. I started to create things, perhaps that was my first creation, my first victory..." (Yves, Story 3)</p>
Reconquering self-esteem	<p>"For four years, since Seoul, I had been winning loads of things. [...] I was so confident, I had been training for six months, I made sure I told everyone!" (Tomas, Story 1)</p> <p>"In sport, there is a lot of luck. You have to do everything you can to get there, but after that success or failure in a competition is not ruled by that. I had quite a lot of luck. Between playing at a certain level and winning, it's something else. What helped me a lot was saying to myself : <i>'I've done everything I can to get there'</i>" (Tomas, Story 1)</p>
Decision to get out of incoherent contexts	
Quest for meaning and coherence	<p>"I was in a kind of fog of contradictions and paradoxes, which would later lead me to creating [<i>my company</i>]" (Yves, Story 3)</p> <p>"The people who took over the company were very pushy. My boss left [...] When he left he said <i>'the best person to replace me is Tomas'</i>, naming me. That didn't happen [...]. A bit later there was another similar opportunity. So I sent an e-mail to say that I was interested in the post. I had no reply, until the day I learnt that someone else had been appointed [...] I almost felt like it was the end... One day someone said: <i>'they had a hard time finding someone, they offered it to everyone'</i>. I said to myself <i>'this is not the place for me any more'</i>". (Tomas, Story 1)</p>

Theme	Representative quotes
Emergence of the start-up project	
Internal triggers	<p>“I had nothing, I was finished. [...] it was a time with moments of real, profound solitude”. (Yves, Story 3)</p> <p>“I found myself in contact with social extremes, I thought I had to do something. The importance of personal and social failure is too strong, the question is: how to help the greatest number of entrepreneurs who have good ideas to not be amongst the 100,000 who will fail?” (Mathieu, Story 2)</p>
External triggers	<p>“I found a job as a representative which allowed me to put some money aside. [...] The work I was doing was unbearable.” (Yves, Story 3)</p> <p>“There were two triggers. I read an article on the Internet [...] and] the second, was the realisation that there are lots of people who want to start their own business: 200,000 start-ups. There are 100,000 who in two to three years will fail. A failure rate of 50%. [...]” (Mathieu, Story 2)</p>
Meaning of the project	<p>“I want to give meaning to economic projects and give economic value to a social project. I don’t want to be on the extremes, I am in the middle, not everything is black or white. [...] My project is to help people to stand up. Give people a chance.” (Mathieu, Story 2)</p> <p>“Three years ago we were working on disability, now we are working on difference [...] the best way of living together is to accept that others are different. It is not the other who is different to me, it is the both of us who are different from one another. When you say to someone ‘<i>you’re different to me</i>’, the difference is borne by the other person, you put yourself in the correct place and the other must move towards you. [...] Difference is borne by yourself first (Tomas, Story 1)</p>

**Marie-Josée BERNARD** is Doctor in Sciences of Management, she is holder of a post master degree in Philosophy and in Human Resources Management. She was Human Resources Manager. She is professor in Management, Leadership, and human development at EM LYON BUSINESS SCHOOL, and executive and career coach. Expert in the field of the entrepreneurial resilience, research topic of which she is at the origin of emergence, she published several articles, chapters on this subject since 2006, and a book in 2016: «Entrepreneuriat, course of life and Resilience », Editions L'Harmattan.

**Saulo DUBARD BARBOSA** is Associate Professor at EMLYON Business School, where he currently teaches new venture creation and social entrepreneurship at different levels. His main research interests are on decision making under uncertainty, venture creation, and social change. His doctoral dissertation, on the risk perception associated with new venture creation, received the 2009 Best Doctoral Dissertation Award by the FNEGE and the French Entrepreneurship & Innovation Academy.



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