# An Exploration into How Emancipatory Entrepreneurship Provides a Transitory Route for At-Risk Societal Groups to Improve Their Life Circumstances

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the

University of Liverpool

for the degree of

Doctor in Philosophy

by

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October 2022

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## Abstract

The growing recognition of societal grand challenges, and the belief that new organizations can play a direct role in helping to solve them (George et al., 2016), has led to a surge of new ways of understanding, enacting and promoting entrepreneurship. This has become more prominent in social contexts facing challenging or threatening life circumstances, where individuals, organisations and communities are increasingly using entrepreneurial activity to mitigate, alleviate or overcome social problems.

This emancipatory view of entrepreneurship has been welcomed by scholars and policy-makers alike, since prosocial entrepreneurial action, as "efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or group of individuals" (Rindova et al., 2009, p.477), can potentially lead to positive societal change.

While this emancipatory understanding of entrepreneurship is relevant and timely, many questions remain unanswered, particularly in terms of how it is enacted, by whom and with what consequences. First, much of the literature at the intersection of challenging contexts, entrepreneurship and emancipation has been focused on extreme poverty, limiting the explanatory power and potential societal contribution of emancipatory entrepreneurship. Second, emancipatory entrepreneurship has generated limited studies (Jennings et al., 2016), most of them delineating the boundaries around types of groups sharing backgrounds characteristics (Marti et al., 2013, Verduijn and Essers, 2013), rather than the social problems they share or seek to overcome, which is the intended outcome of emancipatory entrepreneurship. Finally, and perhaps as a result of the latter, literature has overemphasised the role of access to resources, undermining the underlying process.

These three criticisms bring to light the need for research looking at emancipatory processes propelled by entrepreneurship within at-risk groups, sharing social problems, challenges or threatening life circumstances.

This study asks: How does emancipatory entrepreneurship provide a transitory route for at-risk societal groups to improve their life circumstances?

Through exploring the process of emancipatory entrepreneuring this thesis has uncovered new understandings for how the most vulnerable and marginalised in society can make substantial change to their lived experience. The doing of entrepreneurship has been shown to produce pro-social outcomes without focus placed upon economic gain. Instead focus is placed upon the interconnected and inter-personal nature of entrepreneuring as a context specific process. Through its enactment those at-risk can find a pathway back into mainstream society, but more so can find a means to develop self-worth, self-trust and self-esteem. In seeking emancipation this thesis highlights that this is not an individualistic process, shunning support from others in attempt to live a life of freedom. Rather it is via social, communal, and engaged action that at-risk populations, who have had their voices restricted or removed from the social reality around them, can express their voices and declare their intentions.

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# Chapter One - Introduction

## 1 Peter's Story

Peter had never been to prison before. The closest he came to criminal activity was taking 'social drugs' as a teenager at house parties during the 1990s. Unfortunately during a period of job stagnation, family bereavement, relationship issues, and an unexpected pregnancy, Peter began to make decisions which upon reflection, were not his best:

> *"So basically in 2014, a so-called friend of mine asked me to do him a favour, I picked up a parcel which turned out to be a kilo of cocaine. The Police were waiting for me as I got off the train in Newcastle"*
>
> *"And was that your first foray into transporting drugs?"*
>
> *"Yeah literally anything like that, I mean don't get me wrong I'd done drugs as a kid sort of thing, nothing really heavy, you know, social partying I suppose … So that's how far adrift I was from any sort of wrongdoing previously if you like."*

Today Peter takes full responsibility for his actions, he accepts trafficking drugs across the UK is a criminal offence and understands why he was sentenced for 'Conspiracy to Supply Class A Drugs,' receiving 6 years and 9 months in prison. It was an experience which inevitably changed Peters life in ways he cannot put into words. What was the beginning of a potentially positive managerial career, alongside becoming a new dad, became a period defined by losing all freedom, of enduring violence, of being moved from prison to prison, of losing contact with his child and family, and of enduring nights were cell mates overdosed on drugs.

Despite this, during his sentence Peter never took part in criminal activity. He never took drugs as a way of escapism, he never became involved in prison politics or gang culture. Instead he began developing a book publishing start-up. Somehow, whilst enduring a life of orders, of regimented eating, exercising, bathing, and socialising, Peter undertook an activity requiring

freedom of creativity and expression, and became a legitimate entrepreneur. Peter kept his business idea to himself for a long time inside prison for fear of idea theft and for marking himself as different from the prison status quo. As such he never engaged in formal entrepreneurship training. Upon release however, he had already applied for angel investment and had been approved for a business loan.

Most surprisingly, although Peter's story is unusual, it certainly is not unique. Across the UK prison population there are legitimate entrepreneurial individuals. They even exist in the 'worst UK prison' where inspectors report that "half the prisoners remained locked in their cells during the working day, violence of all kinds had increased since the previous inspection in 2015, and nearly two-thirds of prisoners said it was easy or very easy to obtain drugs" (Travis, 2018), even here certain inmates make attempts at legitimate entrepreneuring. But not all inmates do, most are enticed back into deviant lifestyles, some keep their head down and keep out of trouble, some join gangs and some do not cope at all. Peter did cope however, somehow through entrepreneurial activity, he transitioned from a lived experience of high constraint and oppression, to one of agency and a sense of liberation.

## 2 Entrepreneuring as an emancipatory project

Peter's story not only begins to reveal how relatively easy it is for members of society to become marginalised and suffer inequality and constraint, but that despite such circumstances, novel entrepreneurial routes exist to help transition people out of such contexts both physically and psychologically. Global social issues such as inequality and contexts of oppression are often referred to as 'grand societal challenges'. The growing recognition of grand societal challenges, and the belief that new organizations can play a direct role in helping to solve them (George et al., 2016) has led to a surge of new ways of understanding, enacting and promoting entrepreneurship. These are issues commonly referred to as wicked problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973), which transcend international, socio-political and economic borders and hold

the potential to negatively impact upon large groups of people. Issues such as poverty, climate change, water scarcity, inequality and global pandemics present critical problems requiring solutions across all levels, from governmental policy development, to on the ground stakeholder implementation. Voegtlin et al., (2022) however contend most grand societal challenges are non-linear, contain feedback loops and present as so complex and difficult, as to suggest solutions which circumvent as oppose to resolve the core issues themselves. They are comprised of "elements and relationships that cannot be fully described or understood, comprising multiple domains and actors, multiple locations, multiple time frames and [present as] being dynamic" (p.5).

Despite the apparent difficulty of tackling grand societal challenges, entrepreneurialism has been viewed in part as a potential solution. The market imperfections which lead to the existence of grand societal challenges are presented as opportunities to innovate and address change (Fernhaber and Zou, 2022). Within entrepreneurship literature the impact of prosocial enterprises are frequently situated as offering potential solutions across various contexts, including microfinance provision to communities enduring poverty (de la Chaux and Haugh, 2020; Sun and Liang, 2021), refugee entrepreneurship (Bizri, 2017; Ram *et al.*, 2022), gender inequality (Zhao and Wry, 2016) and natural disasters (Ibrahim and El Ebrashi, 2017).

These types of prosocial venturing tend to be led by a social mission (Miller and Wesley, 2010) with aims of acting pro socially to create social and financial value in situations where the state has failed to do so (Dey, 2016). As argued by Dey (2016) however, social entrepreneurship alone cannot tackle grand societal challenges, with many ventures focused upon solving existing problems, or at making existing businesses more socially responsible, yet failing "to grasp the inherent violence and brutality of neoliberal capitalism as the very root cause of recurring crises" (p.564). Focus is often placed upon the outcome of wealth generation, which is viewed as a self-evident solution to pull people out of detrimental circumstances.

Through generating wealth it is argued individuals can improve their socioeconomic standing and in turn transition out of restrictive contexts (Chliova, Brinckmann and Rosenbusch, 2015), when in fact they may simply reproduce the types of restraint attempted to be overcome. Such a position suggests the need to turn away from an institutional perspective and instead turn to the agentic lived experience of those existing within challenging contexts who are vulnerable to constraint, to gain a better insight into the actions they take to affect a positive life change.

## 3 At-Risk Groups

Although grand societal challenges transcend international, socio-political and economic borders, within these challenges we find those which apply across the full spectrum of society (e.g climate change, gender inequality, pandemics), and those which seem particularly detrimental to the most at-risk within society (e.g poverty, inequality, oppression). Protection from such socially discriminating challenges comes in the form of collective acceptance and embracement from society (Mechanic and Tanner, 2007; Bain and Parkinson, 2010; Russell, 2016). Acceptance within the community brings access to resources (both physical and knowledge based), established networks, social support (both emotional and practical), and most importantly validation of self-worth (Pritchard-Jones, 2018), a collection of benefits which help to mitigate times of hardship and suffering. Individuals and social groups at-risk therefore, are those who are vulnerable to marginalization from the accepted norms, values and beliefs of the society they exist within (Webb et al., 2009). As a consequence, they often suffer from a complex array of overlapping problems, lack of access to resources, poor job prospects and poor health, leaving them vulnerable to social exclusion, discrimination and harm. Being at-risk may arise from "personal incapacities, disadvantaged social status, inadequacy of interpersonal networks and supports, degraded neighborhoods and environments, and the complex interactions of these factors over the life course" (Mechanic and Tanner, 2007, p.1220). Such complexity presents significant challenges for those at-risk attempting to

transition out of detrimental contexts, and across at-risk groups (e.g homelessness, addiction, offenders, refugees) the duration of this process is dependent upon complex factors.

Considering homelessness, Chamberlain and Johnson (2013) outline five pathways which lead into adult homelessness - housing crisis, family breakdown, substance abuse, poor mental health and youth homelessness to adult homelessness. Within each pathway no individual is identical to another with both structural and cultural factors constraining the choices that people can make, requiring solutions which affect change at both the cultural and structural level. Overcoming and then reexperiencing constraint is not uncommon for transitioning at-risk groups, and is found by Allsopp, Sigona and Phillimore (2014) investigating poverty and asylum seekers, discovering "there is ample qualitative evidence of the stigma which asylum seekers and refugees experience as a result of their poverty. This is experienced as a 'double jeopardy' among certain marginalised groups, including members of the LGBT community" (p.19). Here we see how when poverty affects such large groups of people who have previously experienced stereotyping, a social memory persists, allowing further division and discrimination to likely occur (Gissi, 2019).

At-risk groups therefore can face interconnected challenges whereby one feeds into another and into another, exacerbating the rehabilitative needs for intervention. In their wide ranging review of social inequality and health interventions Luchenski et al., (2018) found that "people who are excluded from mainstream society, such as those experiencing homelessness, imprisonment, drug addiction, and sex work, have considerably higher rates of disease, injury, and premature mortality than the general population" (p.267). The authors highlight the need to focus upon addressing excluded populations as a whole, rather than individually focussing upon subpopulations "defined by singular risk factors" (p.266). For example providing housing is an effective strategy to resolve homelessness, but it does little to address the needs of those who are homeless with mental health and addiction issues.

## 4 Underpinning theoretical perspectives

To explore this complex, multi-layered space further, I recognised the need to consider theoretical perspectives accounting for both the practical aspects applied currently to support at-risk groups, as well as the use of entrepreneurship within challenging contexts. As such I engage with two theoretical perspectives: Emancipatory entrepreneuring and rehabilitation theories.

### 4.1 Emancipatory Entrepreneuring

To be emancipated is to experience an act of being set free in order to pursue liberty or social resources previously restricted by a controlling influence (Laclau, 2016). Within the broader management studies literature and the corporate world, Alvesson and Willmott (1992) redefine emancipation towards a focus upon *micro-emancipation*, as opposed to macro-emancipation and social structural modes of domination, placing focus instead upon organizational conditions, in which "attention is focused on concrete activities, forms and techniques that offer themselves not as means of control, but as objects and facilitators of resistance" (p.446). Rather than overthrowing managerial and organizational control, pragmatic 'loopholes' are found and exploited, gradually reducing constraints to create often temporary spaces of autonomy within institutionalised relations of power (Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman, 2009, p.553).

In contrast to the macro-micro view of emancipation, is that put forward by Huault et al., (2014) who describe the macro-micro approach as a false dichotomy which misses much of the overlapping nature of movements of resistance. Rather than starting from an assumed position of inequality, Huault et al., (2014) invoke French philosopher Ranciere, and instead assume equality is a 'founding premise'. Viewed in this way emancipation "means learning to be equals in an unequal society" (Huault et al., 2014, p.31). In application to the corporate world Huault et al., (2014) define the struggles for emancipation as being "prompted by the desire to assert one's equality in the face of experiences of inequality manifest at work. This takes place

through the creation of dissensus in and beyond the organization, which is expressed in the reconfiguration of what is considered to be sensible (or not) within the organization" (p.36). Considered in this manner the everyday activities people undertake within employment can count for more than just providing a brief relief from oppressive management, and instead can represent a sense of 'disruption' and a 'scene for dissensus', potentially altering how an individual experiences an organization, moving towards a sense of emancipation.

It is here we begin to outline our working definition of emancipation as it applies to at-risk groups, finding congruence in the work of Huault et al., (2014) regarding a need to create a dissensus and a reconfiguration of what is accepted as sensible within broader societal norms. A common consequence of being at-risk is unemployment, and as such emancipation is not necessarily sought from within an established corporation, but rather from the wider multi-layered complexity of disempowering social structures, suggesting a need to consider emancipatory approaches which recognise the disruptive processes involved in transitioning through these layers.

One potential solution put forward within literature to address the multi-layered complexity of marginalisation of at-risk groups, is the undertaking of a socially situated pro-social process, such as entrepreneurialism, which has been suggested can play a central role in not just the occupation of the at-risk individual, but also in their ability to overcome and persist through restrictions (Clarke and Holt, 2017; Slade Shantz et al., 2018; Visscher, Heusinkveld and O'Mahoney, 2018). Literature has highlighted this relationship in various detrimental contexts including for those living in environments such as extreme resource scarcity (Hota, Mitra and Qureshi, 2019), patriarchal societies (Al-Dajani et al., 2015; Lindvert, Patel and Wincent, 2017) or institutional voids (Mair and Marti, 2009; Heilbrunn, 2019). Across such contexts the ability for 'entrepreneuring' to produce change in the lived experience is often focussed upon within literature. Entrepreneuring as a concept was introduced by Steyaert (1997) as a

process theory which places focus upon the continuous changing nature of entrepreneurship and the undertaking of actions which bring entrepreneurialism into effect, a process of becoming and of change creation (Steyaert, 1997). As a 'lived experience' (Morris et al., 2012) the *doing* of entrepreneuring takes place as a social process, with a new lived reality co-produced with surrounding others often in aid of disrupting the status quo (Anderson, Dodd and Jack, 2012). As such with entrepreneuring emerging from the desire to enact agency and create disruption within the existing order, "it inherently involves some form or level of emancipation" (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2022, p.584).

The emancipatory view of entrepreneurship has been welcomed by scholars and policy-makers alike, since prosocial entrepreneurial action, as "efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or group of individuals" (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009, p.477) can potentially lead to positive societal change. In their now seminal paper, Rindova, Barry and Ketchen (2009) introduce 'emancipatory entrepreneuring' to the literature, where the undertaking of entrepreneurship is viewed through an emancipatory lens and seen as 'change creation through the removal of constraints' (p. 479). In their view, entrepreneurial projects are indeed emancipatory efforts, whereby individuals make use of the entrepreneurial toolkit "to disrupt the status quo and change their position in the social order in which they are embedded—and, on occasion, the social order itself" (p.478).

It involves 'breaking free' from authority and 'breaking up' perceived restriction and as such goes further than both Alvesson and Willmott (1992) and Huault et al., (2014) in seeking emancipation which creates such disruption as to effect lasting change to the disempowering social order. Emancipatory entrepreneuring consists of three core elements, seeking autonomy, authoring and making declarations. In seeking autonomy actors are striving to "escape from or remove perceive constraints in their environments" (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009,

p.480) which could exist as environmental, economic, cultural or institutionally. This may also be viewed as an effort to escape the values, customs, and practices that limit autonomy; as such, it may occur on an ideological or perceptual level (Chandra, 2017). Authoring concerns navigating the "rules of engagement with key resource providers" and how in its implementation it reflects "change creation intent" (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009, p.480). Rather than rejecting preexisting social institutions, the authoring process focuses on a (re)organizing of resource exchange within the framework of existing systems. Authoring therefore is a process of becoming, and from the actors perspective requires taking ownership of one's own narrative and as such could involve appropriating ready-made narratives, behaviours and discourses to competently partake in the social system (Gherardi, 2015). Finally the ability to make declarations concerns possessing the will and agency to declare intended change "to mobilize support and generate change effects" (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009, p.480). Such declarations may be given in an array of modes and formats, such as "revealing participation in collaborative production networks" (Al-Dajani et al., 2015, p.726) which previously had to remain hidden to continue their existence.

Considered together, both the perspectives of Huault et al., (2014) as well as Rindova, Barry and Ketchen (2009), help to provide a working definition of emancipation for this thesis moving forward, in that to experience emancipation, is to perceive disruption to the oppressive context to such an extent as to afford the individual or group the opportunity, whether via local dissensus or radical reform, as to enact change for the betterment of oneself.

The emancipatory entrepreneurial perspective is viewed in both a provocative and contemporary manner, placing focus upon change creation as opposed to wealth generation (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016), and has prompted limited yet varied research. Chandra (2017) explores the empowering potential of emancipatory entrepreneuring with ex-offenders in Indonesia. Former terrorists are employed within small café franchises and

experience what identifies as ‘market based’ and ‘relations based’ emancipation. The core of each however revolves around the creation of a new space within what would be a disempowering societal structure, a space where ‘reauthoring’ can be undertaken and a reconfiguration of the self through entrepreneurial actions can take place.

A similar outcome is observed with refugees undertaking entrepreneurial activity by Adeeko and Treanor (2022). Despite being prescribed a stigmatized identity, individuals are able to “refute this ascription by reconfiguring themselves as entrepreneurial actors and, in so doing, to distance the self from this damaging label that taints all other life experiences” (p.24). The concept of restricted emancipation is also identified by Castellanza (2022) who researched the abject poor women of South-West Cameroon and the impact of participating in farming cooperatives and business networks. Their results found that despite being allowed to participate in cooperatives and gain access to resources, such participation did not prevent the continuation, and in some cases increase, of gendered discrimination and enforcement of traditional norms upon women, highlighting the role oppression and power can continue to play in cases of *liberation*, as well as the need to accommodate such constraint. In effort of testing the boundaries of emancipatory entrepreneuring Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian (2016) investigated the difference context makes for those seeking emancipation from within developed economic regions as opposed to *developing* regions. Exploring the motives for pursuing an entrepreneurial lifestyle, their study finds that context heavily impacted upon perceived opportunity realization. Results displayed the power of institutional restriction, in that even though respondents wanted some form of emancipation from constraining working hours, workload and family commitments, they were held back by concerns of job loss and loss of clients, attributed to a fear of a presumed reproduction of constraints from the (apparently liberating) entrepreneurial lifestyle.

### 4.2 The dark side of emancipatory entrepreneuring

Despite the relevance of emancipatory entrepreneuring for understanding how individuals overcome constraint, there is a dark side to it. The "dark side of emancipation from a power perspective" (p.583) was investigated by Radu-Lefebvre et al., (2022) in their longitudinal study of power and entrepreneuring in family business succession. They highlight the engagement in entrepreneuring as an effect of power relations, discussing the need to *work with power* as well as against it in order to gain emancipation *through it.* In doing so they discuss key criticisms of the emancipatory entrepreneuring perspective, that of the assumed 'entrepreneurial hero'. Radu-Lefebvre et al., (2022) reveal the "suffering, anger and resilient efforts of the [entrepreneur] as well as his pettiness and low blows in relation to the incumbent" (p.596), positioning the entrepreneur as a human being with limitations rather than following the often assumed heroic 'Silicon Valley' entrepreneurial narrative (Baker and Welter, 2018). Secondly by highlighting the need to engage differently with power and constraint, Radu-Lefebvre et al., (2022) problematize the assumption within literature of the intrinsic *rehabilitative process* at-risk individuals steadily pass through, when in fact entrepreneuring and emancipation *may not work in conjunction*.

To better understand the process of how at-risk groups can be reintegrated back into a community, it is necessary to discuss an alternative approach dealing specifically with rehabilitation in close connection to entrepreneurship.

### 4.3 Reintegration Theory

The process of marginalised communities or individuals being accepted back into a social system is complex, layered, and interpersonal. It is often not enough for e.g a homeless person to be given a place to live and to expect the underlying causes of homelessness to be addressed (Shelter, 2016). These are issues tangled within other issues, developed over time and in some cases may present as an aspect of an individual's identity (Wainwright and Muñoz, 2020). To

understand this process better, I considered the current theoretical perspectives within reintegrative literature.

When exploring the practice of reintegrating communities or individuals back within a social system, two theories from criminological research stand apart in the predominance of their application and review, the risk-needs-responsivity (RNR) approach (Andrews, Bonta and Wormith, 2011), and the Good Life Model (GLM) (Ward and Maruna, 2007).

The application of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) theory has been influential within the assessment of offender reintegration for over 30 years across the UK (Horan, Wong and Szifris, 2020) with the essential goal of reducing recidivism. As a model it combines an "actuarial, managerial approach with a rehabilitative, clinical model for supervision" (Viglione, 2019, p.656). Separated into its component parts, the 'risk' dimension concerns devising a programme which identifies the risk of reoffending and matches it with a similar level of intervention intensity, the higher the risk of reoffending, the greater the involvement of intervention support. The need aspect supports determining what these dynamic risk factors are, focussing only on those criminogenic needs directly connected to reoffending and which hold the potential for change (Andrews, Bonta and Wormith, 2011). Andrews and Bonta, (2010) recognised a "Central Eight" collection of dynamic risk factors, including history of Antisocial Behaviour, Antisocial Personality Pattern, Antisocial Cognition, Antisocial Associates, Family/Marital circumstances, School/Work, Leisure/Recreation, and Substance Abuse (Viglione, 2019). The responsivity principle ensures that any reintegration programme is matched to the characteristics of the offender (Horan, Wong and Szifris, 2020), "tailoring the intervention to the learning style, motivation, abilities, and strengths of the offender" (Andrews, Bonta and Wormith, 2011, p.738).

Often referenced in contrast to the RNR approach, yet in reality finds much common ground, is the Good Life Model (GLM) (Ward and Maruna, 2007), which aims to reduce

recidivism by developing offenders with the skills and resources to acquire primary goods in prosocial ways, motivating and enabling them to lead pro-social lives and to integrate within a community (Zeccola, Kelty and Boer, 2021). In addition to ensuring a reduction in risk to society, the GLM suggests interventions which support reintegration should focus upon what the primary drivers are for each individual, what their 'primary goods' are, which all people are predisposed to seek out via secondary goods (e.g the primary good of love is achieved through the secondary good of a secure relationship). The act of committing a crime and experiencing marginalization is a consequence of an inappropriate attempt to secure a primary good via a maladaptive secondary good. The GLM suggests that interventions should aim to promote an individual's primary goods alongside managing or reducing risk, encouraging and respecting the individual's capabilities to make choices for themselves (McNeill and Weaver, 2010; Horan, Wong and Szifris, 2020). Criminogenic needs are therefore "addressed in the broader pursuit of strengthening a client's capacity to achieve valued goods (vs. addressing criminogenic needs with the sole aim of reducing risk) by way of the acquisition of internal (e.g. skills and knowledge) and external resources (e.g. social supports and vocational training)" (Prescott, Willis and Ward, 2022, p.3).

## 5 Gaps and The Underpinning Theoretical Question

Both the RNR and GLM have gained popularity in their proposed ability to reintegrate marginalised individuals back into society (S. Kirkwood and McNeill, 2015). Despite this the RNR model has been criticised for placing too much focus upon deficits (Looman and Abracen, 2013), potentially holding back the process of reintegration and preventing people from living a fulfilling life (Canton, 2014). Equally the GLM has faced criticism for neglecting the importance of restabilising familial networks and reconnecting with the local community (Horan, Wong and Szifris, 2020), as well as lacking empirical data establishing its efficacy for recidivism outcomes (Zeccola, Kelty and Boer, 2021). Both theories are also criticised for

taking a risk-assessment approach, inherently holding people accountable for things they *might* do at some point in the future (Bushway, 2020), for neglecting to account for nuance when applying broad risk assessments to marginalised groups, and for ignoring the need for more culturally informed accounts of risk (Shepherd and Lewis-Fernandez, 2016; Dyck, Campbell and Wershler, 2018).

Equally within literature the assumed reintegrative role of emancipatory entrepreneuring has been criticised across several aspects, with many questions remaining unanswered, particularly in terms of how it is enacted, by whom and with what consequences. Undertaking emancipatory entrepreneuring carries with it the assumed removal of constraint during a progressively linear process, an assumed apriori positive outcome (Blackburn and Ram, 2006), and an assumption that entrepreneuring and emancipation work together. Goss et al., (2011) develop this criticism, proposing constraint from the emancipatory entrepreneuring perspective implicitly suggests a static barrier which hinders and stalls progress and simply needs to be overcome, rather than acting as a dynamic social process embedded within the wider context.

The lack of clarity and research around dynamic constraint within literature is important, as it obscures not only the very real effort exerted by constraint in resisting liberation, but also the different processes undertaken to outmaneuver and oppose dynamic constraint become misinterpreted or missed. Emancipatory entrepreneuring literature therefore overlooks what enables emancipatory processes, meaning we know little about the strategies employed and the constituent parts. This is a significant gap considering we know emancipatory entrepreneuring is undertaken within contexts of constraint and is utilized in rehabilitative practices (Patzelt, Williams and Shepherd, 2014). Furthermore, emancipatory entrepreneurship has generated limited studies (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016), most of which delineate the boundaries around types of groups who share background characteristics e.g. Indian women, homeless people etc (Verduijn et al., 2014; Ferraz de Campos and Munoz, 2019), rather than

the social problems they share or seek to overcome, which is the intended outcome of emancipatory entrepreneurship. Finally, and perhaps as a result of the latter, literature has overemphasised the role of access to resources and microfinance, linking emancipation to wealth generation and venture development, undermining the underlying process and neglecting to acknowledge the sense of 'becoming' experienced by the restricted. This is a long, slow, contextually embedded process, "co-produced by people in interaction and in constant negotiation with the shared norms and beliefs specific to a particular place and moment in time" (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2022, p.598).

These criticisms bring to light the need for research looking at emancipatory processes across levels, propelled by entrepreneurship within at-risk groups, sharing social problems, challenges or threatening life circumstances.

This research study therefore asks: How does emancipatory entrepreneurship provide a transitory route for at-risk societal groups to improve their life circumstances?

In order to effectively explore this question and advance emancipatory entrepreneuring theory, this central research question can be broken down into three core questions. Firstly, focusing upon the reconciliation between emancipatory entrepreneuring and reintegrative perspectives, our first question investigates how practitioners working with the rehabilitation of at-risk groups deal and engage with emancipatory entrepreneuring, exploring what the long-standing challenges facing service providers are. Secondly, what antecedes the process of emancipatory entrepreneuring, and how context impacts upon this requires greater clarity and understanding at the agentic level. Finally, how at-risk groups overcome difficult and restricting life circumstances and attempt to take ownership of the emancipatory processes is not fully understood and requires investigation. These three areas of exploration are taken further by this study and form the starting points for the three research articles. First however, considering the nature of the central research question concerns a *process of change*, brief

discussion will be given to the process view of emancipatory entrepreneuring, summarised below.

### 5.1 A process view of emancipatory entrepreneuring

It is through viewing emancipatory entrepreneuring from a process perspective that we can understand "the factors that cause individuals to seek to disrupt the status quo and change their position in the social order in which they are embedded—and, on occasion, the social order itself" (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009, p.478). Indeed the process of emancipation can be viewed as a series of discrete events attempting to affect cultural, social or institutional change (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009). Process theory focusses upon the process of transformation and change of organisations and individuals within a societal context, considering change as a natural state for subjects (Hjorth, Holt and Steyaert, 2015). Change can be accounted for empirically by longitudinal observations of an entity being studied over two or more points in time, if a noticeable difference has occurred, we can say the entity has changed (Van de Ven, 2007). There are various types of process theory, including lifecycle models depicting change through phases, teleological models viewing development as a cycle towards goal achievement, dialectical models where conflict and confrontation produce change, and evolutionary models depicting change as driven via competition for scarce resources within an environment (Van de Ven, 2007).

More broadly within process literature, we can identify varying ontological perspectives of the social world and how process and temporality are constituted. Langley et al., (2013) broadly highlight how process can be viewed from two differing approaches. From an entitative position, the world is constituted of substantive, stable things which experience change only in their positioning in space and time or via their qualities, with their constituent parts remaining unchanged. This approach is critiqued by Tsoukas and Chia (2002) who argue that such 'synoptic' accounts provide only 'snapshots' of points in time which although may help to

highlight patterns across time, fail to do "justice to the open-ended micro-processes that underlay the trajectories described; it does not quite capture the distinguishing features of change — its fluidity, pervasiveness, open-endedness, and indivisibility" (p.570). From a processual perspective therefore, the idea of enduring substantive properties is a fallacy, rather the world is composed of processes with change being pervasive and indivisible (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) as all entities exist in a continuous state of becoming.

Equally discussion exists as to where the notion of change originates, whether exogenously or endogenously. Hernes and Weik (2007) suggest that exogenous change is constituted through the "actions, communication, behaviour and so on, [which] are influenced by the external context of the process, which may consist of entities such as rules, institutions, customers or competitors" (p.253). By contrast the endogenous view does not rely upon the influence of the external context, but rather the process interacts with itself, constantly moving through a process of construction and reconstruction. Focus here is placed on time, "in the sense that stabilization into entities takes place over time, thus influencing the further unfolding of the process" (p.262). Considering these varying ontologies, from a meta-theoretical perspective, this thesis approaches process from a processual perspective, taking actors as entities which experience continuous change as a consequence of their internal interpretation of an external context.

The process perspective aligns with the emancipatory entrepreneuring view, with emancipatory entrepreneuring never perceived in a static sense, as events take place in continuous motion towards the emancipation of the group or individual (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009; Hjorth, Holt and Steyaert, 2015). Process perspectives have been applied to emancipatory entrepreneuring across a variety of contexts.

Considering the process of change experienced by communities suffering from poverty, Tobias, Mair and Barbosa-Leiker, (2013) investigate transformative entrepreneurship within

the context of poverty in Rwanda. They observed that the process of transformative action requires inclusion of intangible social elements, including engaging community members in meaningful ways to generate social value, along with "including ordinary entrepreneurial protagonists … to grasp the interdependence between economic and social transformative mechanisms such as poverty and conflict reduction" (p.738). Through doing so it was observed that as income increased for community members, a higher level of social trust increased, producing a prosocial consequence for the individual and their community. Through increasing social value, conflict between and within the community reduced, suggesting that conflict resolution may form an "integral component in the process of emancipating a variety of individuals and groups from existing constraints" (p.738).

In their research regarding path-dependency in environments of conflict and crisis, Cheung and Kwong (2017) explored how entrepreneuring acts under contexts of extreme pressure. Reflecting Mcmullen and Dimov (2013), Cheung and Kwong (2017) refer to entrepreneurship as a 'historically determined journey'. In cases of extreme resource scarcity, such as conflict or poverty, Cheung and Kwong argue entrepreneurs are more inclined to remain within their 'pathway', seeking to make further extended use of their existing resources, "reinforcing incremental rather than path-breaking changes as one may expect" (p.905). Cheung and Kwong suggest that as a means to break this locked-in process, entrepreneurs immersed themselves within place and its meagre resources, "renewing and creating new paths by efficiently reconfiguring the meagre resources towards new purposes" (p.922). The impact of context and place upon process is investigated by Williams and Shepherd (2016) who investigated disaster events and the response of entrepreneurs. They found that "venture creation itself can be transformational for the entrepreneur, providing the context for success from the very setting that was threatening" (p.366). This transformation occurs through the process of replacing lost resources due to disaster (property, equipment, vehicles) via engaging in social resources (other

victims, support organisations), and as resource replacement is achieved, such resources increase in salience creating 'positive expectancy and hope'. In consideration of future *hope*, there is alignment here with Morris, Kuratko and Spivack (2012) and their entrepreneur *experience* research, who argue that the "entrepreneur constructs and reconstructs both an identity and a venture by applying motivation, intention, and affective reactions to past and present experiences and the anticipated future" (p.28). As such the process of identity formation developed through entrepreneuring in uncertain environments, could be viewed as developing the hope for future ambitions.

The concept of time - past, current and future events, and the construal of these - is central to process theory. In particular the non-linear understanding of time. Indeed Van de Ven (2007) argues for five forms of how we can understand process theory – unitary progressions, multiple progressions where more than one pathway is followed, cumulative progression with past events building upon current, conjunctive progressions with events in one pathway influencing events in another, and recurrent progressions with repetition of activities over time. As discussed by Langley (1999) however, the types of events and phenomena often studied within process theory, their fluid nature (thoughts, feelings, interpretations), being unrestricted by space and time and operating across multiple levels, entails that they resist neat confinement as 'events', and as such complicate the sense making process. As succinctly put by Hjorth, Holt and Steyaert (2015) process theory is "phenomena-driven, sensitive to the appearing and re-appearing of events woven with actions, material things, structures and values that cohere in patterns of directionality but which resist the *ceteris paribus* dis-assembly needed for the more distant gaze with its attention ordered by statistical knowledge in pursuit of causal relations" (p.600). Through the application of process theory to the emancipatory entrepreneuring perspective, we open up the opportunity to discover new strategies of entrepreneuring to make sense of an acutely phenomenon driven experience.

## 5.2 Process-Tracing Data Analysis

A manner in which we can view the process of emancipatory entrepreneuring is through process-tracing data analysis. We draw upon process-tracing data analysis within the empirical based chapters of this dissertation – chapters three and four. Process-tracing theorises a causal mechanism, observed over time, based upon a series of connected components deemed necessary to explain an outcome (Befani and Mayne, 2014). Components present as a temporal sequence of linked intermediary effects, which when observed together, provide diagnostic evidence and confidence of a casual mechanisms existence (Collier, 2011). As described by Beach (2017) when making a mechanism-based claim, we change the "analytical focus from causes and outcomes to the hypothesized causal process in-between them" (p.2), as mechanisms are not by themselves *causes*, but rather are causal processes triggered by causes, linking them with outcomes in a relationship. Through identifying causal mechanisms, we can empirically and logically test them for necessity, revealing the distinctiveness of the casual mechanism discovered (Muñoz, Cacciotti and Cohen, 2018). As such individual events are not necessarily evidence of a phenomenon *per se*, but rather "evidence is a combination of observations and other contextual factors such as previous knowledge, timing, the way in which the facts emerge, and so on" (Befani and Mayne, 2014, p.22).

Indeed Beach (2017) identifies four forms of evidence as relevant for process-tracing analysis. *Pattern evidence* concerns predicting statistical patterns which may emerge within empirical material. *Sequence evidence* focusses upon the spatial and temporal positioning and chronology of events which can be predicted by a hypothesised causal mechanism. *Trace evidence* occurs where the mere existence of the evidence is a strong indication of proof that part of a hypothesised mechanism exists. Finally *account evidence* concerns the content of empirical material such as the minutes of a meeting detailing a discussion. Within this study sequential evidence is highly relevant and sought, as we know our outcome of the casual

mechanism to be a sense of overcoming constraint (Y), we also know our starting point as being restricted or oppressed in some form and yet commencing entrepreneuring (X). We do not know however what the intervening series of sequential events are which take us from X to Y. Through identifying the spatial and temporal components of this causal mechanism however, we can uncover this process.

Differing to traditional content-based data analysis whereby codes represent words and summarized pieces of text, instead process tracing applies inferential codes representing change in the 'problem formulation' (Chen, Sharma and Muñoz, 2022). When we observe a plausible causal process, process tracing facilitates an intensive theoretically and empirically driven unpacking of each mechanism component, producing a rich body of mechanistic evidence, allowing for strong causal inference (Beach, 2017). Here Beach (2017) advises of three variants of process-tracing: theory-building, theory-testing, and explaining outcome. *Theory-building process-tracing* is a theory centric, inductive approach (as opposed to case-centric) which explores the causal mechanism between X and Y, taking its "theoretical ambitions beyond the confines of the single case" (p.16). This approach begins with empirical material and through structured analysis, detects plausible causal mechanisms between X and Y to build a hypothesised theory. Within *theory-testing process-tracing*, we are tracing an underlying theorised causal mechanism, testing whether it is present in a case and whether the mechanism functions as expected. Finally *explaining-outcome process-tracing* places focus upon a single-case study to find the causes of a particular outcome, reducing generalizability across cases and its ability to develop theoretical claims beyond the case. Within the empirical chapters of this dissertation, a theory-building process-tracing approach is taken in that we already know our outcome (Y), but are yet to discover its causes, in effect requiring our approach to trace backwards from Y to a plausible X. Should we find outcomes unaccounted for, we open the possibility for theory building based upon mechanistic empirical evidence.

# 6 Papers Within this Dissertation

## 6.1 Paper 1: Restorative Entrepreneuring: A New Framework for The Study Entrepreneurship and Emancipation in At-Risk Social Groups

The first paper of this dissertation responds to the initial sub-question – enquiring how practitioners working with the rehabilitation of at-risk groups deal and engage with emancipatory entrepreneuring.

It is known that emancipatory entrepreneuring has been adopted as a process for enabling pro social change for at-risk groups by many third sector organisations committed to emancipatory work. Here entrepreneuring has been applied as a process to support within-person change, attempting to rehabilitate or reintegrate marginalised community members. However upon investigating the initial sub-question, we discovered that there remain many unanswered questions for this approach, namely how it is enacted, with which mechanisms, by whom and with what consequences. To better understand this process required developing an alternative approach dealing specifically with rehabilitation in close connection to entrepreneurship which recognized both agentic and structural causes, rather than attempting to silo them. This paper does so by developing a conceptual framework for the study of entrepreneuring and emancipation in at-risk groups informed by the experiences of organisations working closely with vulnerable individuals in the process of rehabilitation. The framework is thus constructed upon their reflection around long-standing issues and dimensions of emancipatory work and perspectives on the (actual and potential) role that entrepreneuring may play in the process. The framework consists of four interrelated spaces of action which underpin a new approach to enterprising in at-risk groups, which we call: restorative entrepreneuring. This paper therefore tackles the first sub-question by unveiling practitioners attempting to deliver emancipatory entrepreneuring within a multi-layered collection of challenges, which despite the promise of the emancipatory approach, collude to

reduce its impact and effectiveness as a reintegrative strategy.

### 6.2 Paper 2: Entrepreneurship, Emancipation And The Construction Of Autonomy Under Extreme Constraints

To be emancipated is to experience an act of being set free in order to pursue liberty or social resources previously restricted by a controlling influence (Laclau, 2016). In Rindova et al.'s (2009) view, emancipatory entrepreneuring begins with seeking autonomy, where entrepreneurs attempt to overcome the constraints that limit their independence. As highlighted with the second sub question of this dissertation however, very little is known about the processes leading to emancipation, the origins of autonomy, and the interaction between individual and context, in particular with regards to contexts where escape is required to achieve autonomy. How a process can initiate if an essential pre-condition is unachievable is an important understanding currently missing from the literature. To tackle this issue, in our second paper the prison journey of eleven inmates stripped of autonomy who yet developed entrepreneurial careers within a prison is explored.

Using process tracing methodology, our findings reveal that emancipation and entrepreneurship do not necessarily work in conjunction and that seeking autonomy can initiate in extremely restrictive contexts. Our second sub question is answered through the discovery a dynamic relationship with constraint, where autonomy is developed whilst progressing through a process of *exploring* then *exploiting* the 'fractures' of constraint. In doing so a sense of purpose evolves as a transition towards business-like activities is undertaken, moving from an experience defined by the context, towards being defined by the individual. We therefore reveal that this process of 'working constraints' is required before entrepreneuring can commence, indeed this process commences without direct intention of developing a venture. Rather entrepreneuring and venture development is what emerges between the cracks of constraint as a result of expanding the perception for action, or the 'opportunity-action space'. The

construction of spaces – material and perceived - where people can act, are as relevant as the entrepreneurial actions generally prescribed to deal with resource constraints. We answer our second sub question therefore by revealing within this context, what antecedes emancipatory entrepreneuring, or put another way, how autonomy can be constructed.

### 6.3 Paper 3: Entrepreneuring, Emancipation and Pathways To Agency: A Study of Entrepreneurial Experiences After Prison

Those at-risk within society are often subjected to stigmatisation and marginalisation, a 'normalising' process for society which defines deviance against acceptable behaviour (Gans, 1995). A consequence of stigmatisation for those at-risk is the increased fragility of already precarious support networks, alongside a withdrawal from pro-social community members who can validate the self to improve self-worth. One strategy to overcome such stigmatisation is to undertake entrepreneuring. Entrepreneurs are viewed as particularly well positioned to achieve emancipation from oppressive norms such as stigma, as their everyday practices contain subtle acts of resistance against adversity (Sabella and El-Far, 2019) facilitating the construction of "new 'spaces' for living, thinking and interacting" (Montessori, 2016, p.538).

However, we know little of how the process of overcoming stigmatisation via entrepreneuring unfolds. It is key therefore to expand our knowledge of the strategies undertaken in relation to restrictive contexts when attempting to emancipate. This tackles our third sub question, which asked how do at-risk groups overcome difficult and restricting life circumstances and attempt to take ownership of the emancipatory processes? This is the process of authoring through entrepreneuring, a process of taking ownership of one's own narrative in response to the rules and expectations of the societal structure. In this paper we explore the authoring strategies employed by those who have experienced both the removal and then granting of autonomy, attempting to entrepreneur within a stigmatising disempowering social structure. We focus upon eleven ex-offenders who have undertaken

entrepreneuring upon release from prison in attempt to regain their status and independence. We find a unique authoring process comprised of two pathways which, although commence from similar starting points and eventually reach similar outcomes, differ greatly depending upon whether individuals choose to expose themselves to stigmatisation and tackle injustice head on, or whether they seek to accommodate stigmatisation in attempt to move past it. We find that both pathways exploit entrepreneurial narratives as participants attempt to reorganise social systems and take ownership of the constraint imposed by stigmatising norms. We therefore answer our third sub question by showing how recognising and capitalising upon narratives accepted by society can be a successful way to empower and validate the self in the eyes of the surrounding others, facilitating ownership of the emancipatory process.

### 6.4 The Collective Response

Our central research question asked how does emancipatory entrepreneurship provide a transitory route for at-risk societal groups to improve their life circumstances? Through the collective research of our three papers we are able to explore the answer in great detail. We are able to show that the transition is often situated within a complex, multi-layered societal context of constraint, with layers which act together to reinforce restriction against the transition, restricting the impact of prosocial organisations. It was from here that the need to develop a new broader conception of 'restorative entrepreneuring' was identified, bringing to light the challenges facing entrepreneurial practices at both the level of the individual and rehabilitative process, and the challenges facing the systems of support in both the facilitation of emancipatory entrepreneuring and its institutional setting. After situating the transition, we next explored what actions were required to commence the transition out of detrimental circumstances. Here we found the need to engage in micro helping actions to gradually and subtly increase the sense of control and the ability to act. Constraint was revealed as dynamic and required a flexing and waning response to not only work with it, but to exploit the

opportunities it presented in attempt at regaining autonomy. The transition towards a positive life change was therefore commenced with the construction of autonomy, later followed by entrepreneuring.

Finally, continuing the transition from a place of autonomy having been achieved, our final paper displays how the process of emancipation required much more before a sense of agency and control could be experienced for at-risk groups. Here we described the impact of a disempowering societal system upon an at-risk group who although had been granted autonomy, had yet to gain agency. Entrepreneuring was displayed via two authoring pathways which exploited ready made entrepreneurial narratives to either engage with or accommodate stigmatising constraint in attempt at improving the lived experience and to reintegrate within society. Collectively the three papers of this dissertation give much needed insight and understanding into the transitional process of emancipation pertinent to many at-risk groups attempting to overcome oppression via entrepreneuring.

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## Chapter Two – Restorative Entrepreneuring: A New Framework for the Study Entrepreneurship and Emancipation in At-Risk Social Groups


### Abstract

In this paper, we develop a conceptual framework for the study of entrepreneuring and emancipation in at-risk groups. We do so by examining the experiences of organisations working closely with vulnerable individuals in the process of rehabilitation. The framework is thus constructed upon their reflection around long-standing issues and dimensions of emancipatory work and perspectives on the (actual and potential) role that entrepreneuring may play in the process. The framework consists of four interrelated spaces of action, which underlie a new approach to enterprising in at-risk groups, we call: *restorative entrepreneuring*. We propose an agenda as a way of inspiring future scholarly work to explore in more detail the capacity of and possibilities for a new *restorative entrepreneuring* in the support of vulnerable members of our society.



*Keywords: restorative entrepreneuring; emancipation; at-risk groups; research agenda; research-practice gap*

A version of this paper was published in the Journal of Business Venturing Insights:

Wainwright, L. Muñoz, P. 2020. Restorative entrepreneuring: A new cross-disciplinary agenda to support at-risk social groups. Journal of Business Venturing Insights. 13, e00165.

# 1 Introduction

Social groups at-risk are those who are vulnerable to marginalization from the accepted norms, values and beliefs of the society they exist within (Webb et al., 2009). They often suffer from a complex set of overlapping problems, lack of access to resources, low employment prospects and poor health, which leaves them vulnerable to social exclusion, discrimination and physical and psychological harm. Being at-risk may arise from "personal incapacities, disadvantaged social status, inadequacy of interpersonal networks and supports, degraded neighborhoods and environments, and the complex interactions of these factors over the life course" (Mechanic and Tanner, 2007, p.1220).

To counteract these issues, research has begun to observe entrepreneurial projects as rehabilitative and emancipatory efforts (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009), since entrepreneuring can potentially break detrimental cycles and offer an alternative way forward for at-risk social groups. This view of entrepreneurship involves the use of entrepreneurial skills and practices for disadvantaged groups "to disrupt the status quo and change their position in the social order in which they are embedded" (p.478). This idea departs from mainstream theory in terms of the focus placed upon change creation and the emphasis on constraints rather than opportunities (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016). It is about using entrepreneuring - change-oriented activities and projects - with the aim of overcoming or removing perceived constraints in the individuals' environments. It involves seeking autonomy, impetus, breaking free from authority and making declarations about the intended change (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009). This alternative view of entrepreneurial behavior has led to a surge of new ways of understanding, enacting and promoting entrepreneurship in social contexts facing challenging or threatening life circumstances, where individuals, organizations and communities are increasingly using entrepreneuring to tackle social problems (Kimmitt et al., 2019). While it may evolve into self-employment, sole-trading or

start-up activities, this is not assumed to be a necessary outcome that would determine the success of the rehabilitation process.

Despite the promising potential of emancipatory entrepreneuring in this context, our current knowledge and practices seem insufficient to address the challenges discussed above. In a similar manner to how rehabilitation perspectives have remained narrow, monocausal and siloed (Steve Kirkwood and McNeill, 2015), entrepreneurship research has paid too much attention to entrepreneurial dynamics in a restrictive theoretical vacuum, disregarding the complexity of social problems (Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2018) and the influence of broader life circumstances (Kimmitt et al., 2019). Equally, emancipatory entrepreneuring has been criticised for its overtly optimistic view, of achieving emancipation from within neoliberal constructs via micro ventures, and as perpetuating "a form of denial of the evidence that emancipation is often only a fleeting moment, enclosed or neutralized by the expansive force of the capitalist project" (Tedmanson et al., 2015, p.3).

Additionally, as the third sector expands to provide rehabilitative services in many high-income economies, there is a lack of evidence based research demonstrating the effectiveness of interventions (Macmillan, 2010), alongside a lack of theoretical and empirically informed models concerning how best to deliver and integrate social support to at-risk groups (Sharp et al., 2015; Webber et al., 2015; Armstrong et al., 2021; Giebel et al., 2021). While emancipatory entrepreneuring may seem relevant and timely as a way of counterbalancing both the deficiencies in rehabilitation practice, and the daily difficulties facing stakeholders in their capacity and capability to adhere to and deliver evidence based practice (Bach-Mortensen, Lange and Montgomery, 2018), the ubiquitous nature of rehabilitation and the needs of individuals requiring support, suggest that the road to emancipatory work is rough, uneven, and full of unanticipated challenges. This constrains not only the scope of action of both practitioners and academics, but also our collective capacity to support vulnerable groups

through rehabilitation and entrepreneuring.

A new understanding is needed to be able to build meaningful bridges between disciplines and realities and guide future research at the intersection of entrepreneuring and rehabilitation as it pertains to emancipatory work in at-risk groups.

In this paper we seek to develop a conceptual framework for such a purpose. For this to be effective, it needs to be grounded in reality and bring to light the hidden challenges facing support organizations and those at-risk who benefit from their interventions. To do this we examine the challenges experienced by several organisations working closely with vulnerable individuals in the process of rehabilitation. The framework is thus based upon their reflections concerning long-standing issues in the facilitation of emancipatory work and perspectives on the (actual and potential) role that entrepreneuring may play in the process.

From this experience, and from leveraging emancipatory entrepreneuring theory as well as rehabilitation literature (as depicted in figure 1), we articulate the framework through three interrelated dimensions which underlie a new approach to enterprising in at-risk groups, which we call: *restorative entrepreneuring*. We propose an agenda as a way of inspiring future scholarly work to explore in more detail the capacity of and possibilities for a new *restorative entrepreneuring* in the support of vulnerable members of our society.

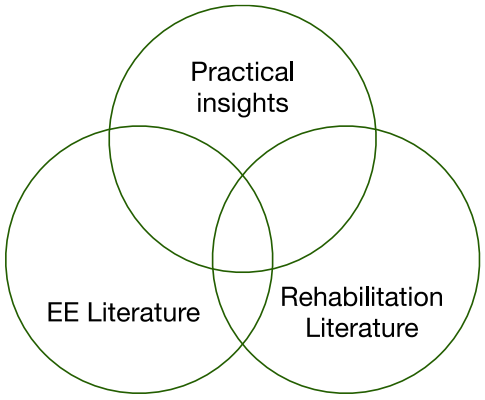


**Figure 1 – Combined theoretical and practical insight review**

## 2 Building on emancipatory entrepreneuring and rehabilitation literature

### 2.1 Emancipatory entrepreneuring

In 2009, Rindova, Barry and Ketchen published their seminal paper positing how entrepreneuring can act as an emancipatory pathway for people in difficult life circumstances. In that time the field of emancipatory entrepreneuring has gathered some momentum with increasing focus placed upon the various contexts in which emancipation can take place.

It is clear that entrepreneurialism for many people around the world plays a central role in not just their lives but also in their identity (Clarke and Holt, 2017; Slade Shantz, Kistruck and Zietsma, 2018; Visscher, Heusinkveld and O'Mahoney, 2018), this is especially so for those living in challenging contexts such as extreme resource scarcity (Hota, Mitra and Qureshi, 2019). Much literature has been produced regarding understanding how entrepreneurialism acts in such contexts, often focussed upon single case studies within situations of extreme poverty (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016). Rindova, Barry and Ketchen (2009) called attention to these individuals and groups existing in contexts of oppression yet seeking to transition out of such contexts via entrepreneurial pursuits, deploying the phrase 'emancipatory entrepreneuring'. The verb *entrepreneuring* is defined "as efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or group of individuals" (p.477). In doing so focus is placed upon the act's individuals carry out and the *processes* they go through in seeking to transition from negative situations.

Within their paper Rindova, Barry and Ketchen (2009) discuss three core aspects of emancipatory entrepreneuring required in order overcome oppression via entrepreneuring. Firstly individuals must achieve autonomy from constraint. Through pursuing autonomy entrepreneurs strive to overcome the limitations to or removal of independence, which may be perceived as economic, societal, or institutional limitations. This may also be viewed as an effort to escape the values, customs, and practices that limit autonomy; as such, it may occur

on an ideological or perceptual level (Chandra, 2017). Once autonomy has been achieved, the process of authoring can commence. Rather than rejecting preexisting social institutions, the authoring process focuses on a (re)organizing of resource exchange within the framework of existing systems. As a result, this is not necessarily a process of attempting to revolutionize a constrained space and overthrow authority (although it might be) but is more so a process of working within a space to gather resources from strongholds of power, displaying compliance within constraint, and creating new relationships and arrangements via micro-processes to bring about change (Haugh and Talwar, 2016).

Authoring therefore is a process of becoming, which from the actors perspective requires taking ownership of one's own narrative in response to the rules and expectations of the disempowering societal structure, and as such could involve appropriating ready-made narratives, behaviours and discourses to partake in the social system (Gherardi, 2015). Making declarations is the final component to emancipatory entrepreneuring and is considered as the "unambiguous discursive and rhetorical acts regarding the actor's intentions to create change – as an important part of the change creation process" (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009, p.485). In effect, this may be seen as the means through which narratives, tales, and symbolic acts are conveyed in order to impact or bring about change (Haugh and Talwar, 2016).

While this emancipatory understanding of entrepreneurship is relevant and timely, many questions remain unanswered, particularly in terms of how it is enacted and with which mechanisms, by whom and with what consequences.

First, much of the emancipatory entrepreneuring literature at the intersection of challenging contexts has been focused on extreme poverty, limiting the explanatory power and potential societal contribution of emancipatory entrepreneurship. As such limited studies have been generated within the literature (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016). Of those, most delineate the boundaries around types of groups sharing background characteristics e.g. Indian

women, homeless people (Mair and Marti, 2009; Verduijn and Essers, 2013), rather than the social problems they share or seek to overcome, whilst overemphasising the role of access to resources. In doing so literature undermines the inherent rehabilitative process through which at-risk individuals overcome constraint, assuming that entrepreneuring and emancipation work in conjunction, when this may not be the case. Finally, and potentially as a result of the latter, what antecedes emancipatory entrepreneuring is yet to be explored, with literature assuming all those at-risk can undertake entrepreneuring and experience an apriori positive outcome, when this too, may not be the case.

To better understand this process, we need to bring into the discussion an alternative approach dealing specifically with rehabilitation in close connection to entrepreneurship.

## 2.2 Approaches to rehabilitation

As there are many factors that can leave people vulnerable to harm, and as such in an at-risk situation, there are also an array of rehabilitation approaches that place emphasis on an equally varied set of factors, e.g. context, capacities, learning styles, pre-conditions and so on. Within offender rehabilitation research, two contrasting models stand out as most often cited and employed in practice (Ogloff and Davis, 2004; Willis and Ward, 2011; Brogan et al., 2015): Risk-Needs-Responsivity - RNR (Andrews et al., 2011) and the Good Life Model - GLM (Ward and Maruna, 2007). The former focuses mostly on aligning the intensity of rehabilitation to an offense committed and/or the individual's needs associated with illegal or deviant behavior. Whereas the latter posits a strength-based framework which emphasizes the concept of human agency, assisting those deemed as 'deviant' to pursue personally meaningful lives guided by their own aspirations. Unlike RNR's focus on *avoidance goals* (e.g. avoiding further criminal behavior), GLM puts greater emphasis on motivational *approach goals,* which

involves a restructuring of mindset towards how to achieve personal goals or 'primary goods' (Ward & Gannon, 2006).

In addition to offender rehabilitation, considering other at-risk groups, homelessness rehabilitation research has developed along both structural and agentic causal strands, with targets for rehabilitation placed either upon adverse housing policies, rising poverty levels and cuts to benefits, or as a result of individual family breakdown, housing eviction, or individuals leaving institutional care (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000).

While prominent in research and practice, these perspectives have been criticized due to their narrow, monocausal and siloed approaches to rehabilitation, lacking in interdisciplinary connectivity when considered for such diverse social issues, which might detract from their effectiveness and emancipatory potential. RNR overemphasizes the 'deficit' and past deviant behaviour, preventing identity transition and leading to disengagement (Case & Haines, 2015) and a sense of being 'doomed to deviance' (Maruna, 2001). In GLM the promotion of undertaking e.g. like-minded societies or sports teams in the pursuit primary goods (e.g. friendship, employment, healthy relationships), might be insufficient to change mindset and means (from to antisocial to prosocial). Finally, issues such as homelessness and other at-risk conditions cannot be so easily siloed into agentic or structural causes (Clapham, 2003). These are complex multi-causal phenomenon and, as there are many factors that can leave people in an at-risk situation, there are also many emancipatory factors that can affect the individual's ability to overcome such circumstances, entailing a variety of rehabilitation pathways.

Many organizations are committed to emancipatory work as a form of rehabilitation for at-risk groups, supporting the transition from ideological oppression such as terrorism or extremist views, or environmental or cultural constraints such as poverty or subsistence lifestyles, towards a personal freedom. This role has been largely played by social enterprises, charities, co-operatives and voluntary organizations, which are collectively recognized as *Third Sector*

*Support Organizations.*

Here, the use of entrepreneurial training has grown in importance as a way of supporting at-risk social groups facing detrimental life-circumstances as a form of 'within-person' change. Within-person change "primarily refers to changes within an individual that occur across time and impact some form of behavior (commonly recidivism or desistance)" (Boman IV and Mowen, 2018, p.193), with entrepreneurship increasing the mechanisms of informal social control across time. For example, 'The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network' is a social enterprise which support refugee entrepreneurs from business idea and marketization, through to business growth and development. Refugees find a sense of engagement and purpose within society, as well as an opportunity to exploit native skills. In a similar manner, 'Enterprise Exchange' focus on helping groups with 'additonal barriers' such as prisoners into self-employment. The cyle of reoffending is reduced by developing entrepreneurial attributes towards the end of a prison sentence so upon release ex-offenders have a clear pathway towards venture creation.

Pathways which employ entrepreneuring are not just limited to third sector organizations. Several high street stores, such as 'Timpson Ltd' and 'Halfords Plc' in the UK, have successfully established offender recruitment programmes, working within prisons to develop entrepreneurial skills for employment as store managers, in turn creating a new sense of identity and purpose outside of illegitimate activities.

## 3 Engaging with reality in framework development

### 3.1 Research approach and participants

To keep the development of our framework grounded in reality, we first need to systematize the every-day and long-standing challenges facing the organizations supporting at-risk social groups, and delineate a research agenda capable of addressing and prioritizing knowledge

needs, as well as providing guidance as we move forward. Conceptual frameworks are normally grounded on literature alone, chosen by the author(s). While relevant, adequate theoretical grounding does not necessarily mean that the suggested path(s) put forward will reflect the challenges, knowledge needs and priorities of problem-holders and knowledge users. If that is the case, the risk is that future valuable work will be devoted to answering wrong or not particularly conducive research questions. To prevent falling into the same trap, we considered four fundamental challenges before letting our ideas and arguments emerge: research responsiveness, pertinence, purpose and significance. In other words: is the framework responding to a pressing issue?, who is it for?, what is it for?, and how can we make it relevant to those who are supposed to benefit from it?

Reflecting on the questions above, we decided to take an alternative approach and find inspiration for the development of our framework in the views of those using entrepreneurial practices to support at-risk groups. Drawing on the tenants of citizen science (Irwin, 1995) whereby members of the public partner with research professionals to collectively gather, submit and analyse data (Bonney et al., 2016), in May 2019 we facilitated a collective scoping workshop with five service providers and engaged in follow-up conversations with a further six support organizations working across the north west region of the UK, as detailed in table 1 below. This we undertook with the aim of uncovering and refining practical challenges and knowledge needs, to bring to light the dimensions of emancipatory entrepreneuring in the process of rehabilitation of at-risk individuals. These organizations cover a wide range of at-risk conditions, including: unemployment, homelessness, drug addiction, mental health and ex-offending. Our conversations focused primarily on long-standing challenges faced by them in the facilitation of emancipatory work and the (actual and potential) role that entrepreneuring may play in the process.

| Support organizations | At-risk situation |
|---|---|
| Micah | Reemployment |
| The Basement Advisory Centre | Homelessness |
| Young Addaction Liverpool | Addiction Support |
| Inside Connections Support CIC | Ex-Offender Support |
| Young Persons Advisory Service | Mental health and wellbeing support |
| Whitechapel homeless | Homelessness |
| Asylum Link Merseyside | Asylum Seeker support |
| Merseyside Refugee Support Network | Asylum Seekers / Refugee support |
| Genie in the Gutter | Mental health and wellbeing support |
| Anfield Boxing Club | Knife crime service |
| Merseyside Youth Association | Employability, health, inclusion |

**Table 1: List of participants**

Within the collective scoping workshop (as detailed in table 2 – 'Scoping Workshop Agenda' below) we facilitated an in-depth discussion regarding the current difficulties faced by service providers in providing rehabilitative or emancipatory support to service users. We focused specifically on challenges to and dimensions of emancipatory work, as the process through which at-risk social groups may overcome difficult life circumstances. Before the workshop session service providers were tasked with independently reflecting on current challenges to their service provision and those faced by their beneficiaries in the process of overcoming their problems. These were then brought to the workshop, shared, discussed and clarified further in follow-up group discussions.

| Time | Item | Action |
|---|---|---|
| 20 mins | **<u>Introduction</u>**<br>• Welcome to the session and introduction<br>• Overview of the research project – its area of interest and why it is being explored<br>• Introduce the purpose of the session – gaining practitioner insight into at-risk sector work and emancipatory pathways. Discussing what the current sector issues are for each practitioner and for at-risk groups.<br>• Establish the importance of practitioner input regarding boundary setting and maintaining research relevance. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 30 mins | **Challenges identification**<br>• Introduction from each practitioner regarding their sector, organization and their role within it.<br>• Each practitioner lists the three challenges facing their service provision. | Practitioner challenges written down on flipchart |
| 1 hour | **Discussion I**<br>• Discussion takes place with all practitioners, looking for where there is similarity to challenges listed, and attempting to identify what is unique about certain challenges.<br>• Narrowing down to the top three challenges<br>• Unique challenges are listed on the wall | Use flipchart to narrow down to the unique challenges |
| 30 mins | **Break** | |
| 1 hour | **Discussion II**<br>• Discussion into what the causes of the three Grand Challenges are | Use sticky notes to list the causes for each on the flipchart |
| 30 mins | **Recap and Reflection**<br>• From reviewing notes of discussion, summarization takes place of key points raised, delivered back to the practitioner group for further clarification and comment.<br>• A final listing of key points is then drawn up with broad agreement from the group. | |

**Table 2: Scoping Workshop Agenda**

## 3.2 Data reflection and early framework development

Data sorting and sensemaking was done collaboratively during and after the workshop. In the first stage of critical reflection, participants used flipcharts to organize, systematize and cluster their insights into areas involving practice, support and themes including stigmatization, users' awareness and perception, funding, social acceptance, public scrutiny, misalignment with policy agenda, measurement and morality. In reference to stigmatization, for example, one of the service providers indicate that "No business which needs a receptionist and has a CSR policy will take on a homeless person". They also make reference to the lack of self-awareness shown by service users, and the need to recover ownership over their own recovery process: "Lack of self-awareness is a big one, friends will joke about being 'an alcoholic' which masks

the seriousness of the behavior", which is followed by "I try to explain to the service users that "your drug addiction is not the problem, the reason for your drug addiction is the problem"" .

The workshop was video-recorded and the flipcharts were kept for further analyses. In a second stage we returned to the workshop participants with the aims of corroborating evidence, checking the accuracy of our interpretations and further enriching and refining our findings. In parallel and with the aim of gaining further substantiation and context, we engaged in a conversation with six new support organizations who worked with at-risk groups from similar sectors, who offered further insight into each of the themes.

After refining insights from the scoping workshop and the feedback received from participants, we were able to recognise collections of insights which although related, were also distinct from each other. Certain insights concerned the challenges facing the at-risk individuals themselves, whereas others spoke more of the impact context had upon service delivery. From here we observed challenges presented across levels of abstraction, from the immediacy of service delivery to the wider political and institutional level of government policies and cultural discrimination. Recognising these patterns allowed for organising and collating these insights under loose titles, allowing for movement and recategorisation where appropriate as understanding of each insight was developed alongside recognising their connectivity. The result of this systemisation was the development of four dimensions for emancipatory entrepreneuring as it pertains to the rehabilitation of at-risk groups: 1. At-risk individuals engaged in EE, 2. The EE rehabilitation process, 3. Facilitation of EE rehabilitation process and 4. The institutional setting. The first two involve entrepreneurial practices and the latter two refer to systems of support. We then proceeded to unpack these dimensions to identify 16 enablers of emancipatory entrepreneuring and the challenges they respond to within the rehabilitative ecosystem, as shown below in table 3.

| | Entrepreneurial practices | | System of support | | Aggregate insight |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **At-risk individuals engaged in EE** | **EE rehabilitation process** | **Facilitation of EE rehabilitation process** | **Institutional setting** | |
| **Dimensions** | Self-stigma<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by breaking the self-stigmatization cycle | Dehumanization in rehabilitation<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by a re-humanization of the rehabilitation process | Negative labelling in rehabilitation<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by a relabeling of the transition out of at-risk circumstances | The higher the visibility of at-risk individual, the higher the stigmatization<br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by a decoupling of the counterproductive effect of bringing rehabilitation closer to the public | **From stigma to a sense of self-worth** |
| **Dimensions** | Unawareness of the at-risk situation<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by an earlier visualization of the at-risk situation | Lack of ownership over the at-risk situation<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by an increase in the sense of ownership over the at-risk situation | Late awareness of an issue requiring support<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by an expansion of the scope of awareness of systems of support | The higher the public awareness, the lower the rehabilitation support<br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by a decoupling of the counterproductive effect of public awareness | **From at-risk unawareness to a sense of ownership** |
| **Dimensions** | Othering and self-marginalization<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by counteracting self-marginalization | Deviant thinking by affiliation<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by counteracting a spiraling down into deviant thinking | No direction, purpose and replacement self<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by constructing new sense purpose and replacement self | Illegitimate replacement self in situation of societal incongruence<br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by a legitimate path forward facing situation of societal incongruence | **From marginalization to construction of a replacement self** |
| **Dimensions** | Negative-value mindset and habits<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by a move away from negative-value mindsets, improving self-confidence and autonomous decision making | The increased recognition of being at-risk, the increase in sense of moral wrongness and shame<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by bringing at-risk to light whilst minimizing the sense of moral wrongness | 'Illegitimate' rehabilitation in the absence of moral judgement<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by tackling at-risk situations whilst minimizing moral judgement | Mutual recognition of 'worthlessness' excludes at-risks groups<br><br>> EE rehabilitation is enabled by fostering a more inclusive recognition of self-worth and autonomy, against societal moral exclusion | **From oppression to empowered autonomy** |

**Table 3: Emancipatory Entrepreneuring rehabilitative framework**

### 3.3 Opening the conversation

Through systematizing the challenges facing at-risk groups and the impact emancipatory entrepreneuring could have, it became clear that we were also discovering clear challenges faced by service providers in their everyday practice. During the course of this research we saw opportunity to engage further with practitioners and increase the impact of the findings through the development of a practitioner facing report. Focus was placed upon the long-standing issues facing service providers as conveyed during the initial and subsequent data gathering stages. Perhaps not surprisingly these included areas relevant to many third sector organisations such as funding and government support. Repeatedly however, in writing the report and collating themes together, we found inclusion of other themes more indicting of wider society and its treatment of at-risk groups. Further these challenges were experienced throughout the rehabilitative ecosystem creating obstacles to the delivery, access and facilitation of an emancipatory *moving forward process.* To aid in tackling these challenges we devised a practitioner focused framework which systematised challenges, labelled as 'START' which recognised the challenges of Stigmatisation, Tangible knowledge of the at-risk context, Resource Alignment regarding funding, Recognition of the individual as a 'deviant' or 'wrong', and the Moral Treatment of those at-risk. Each challenge was then mapped across multiple layers of context, including the individual in the process of moving forward, the process involved, the facilitation required, and the societal context the process was situated within (see table 4).

Developing the report and discussing it with service providers produced a positive opportunity for relationship building and for further data gathering and concept refinement. In doing so we developed our understanding of the wider ecosystem and context at-risk groups and their service providers attempt to operate within. In turn these challenges were reflected

# START Framework

| | | INDIVIDUALS IN THE PROCESS OF STEPPING-FORWARD | PROCESS OF STEPPING-FORWARD | FACILITATION OF STEPPING-FORWARD PROCESS | CONTEXT OF STEPPING-FORWARD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S | STIGMATISING | **SELF-STIGMATISATION**<br>C: Break the self-stigmatisation cycle<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring contribute to breaking the self-stigmatisation cycle? | **DEHUMANISATION**<br>C: Re-humanisation of the stepping forward process<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring facilitate a re-humanisation of this process? | **LABELLING IN REHABILITATION**<br>C: Negative labelling in rehabilitation<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring contribute to relabelling the transition out of at-risk circumstances? | **PARADOX OF PUBLIC STIGMATISATION**<br>C: Break the dual effect of visibility<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring break the dual effect of bringing the process of stepping forward to the public? |
| T | TANGIBLE KNOWLEDGE | **AT-RISK INVISIBILITY**<br>C: Early acknowledgment of the at-risk situation<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring enable an earlier visualisation of the at-risk situation? | **AT-RISK OWNERSHIP**<br>C: Sense of ownership over the at-risk situation<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring increase the sense of ownership over the at-risk situation? | **PROACTIVE KNOWLEDGE**<br>C: Proactive awareness of an issue requiring support<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring expand the scope of action of service providers? | **PARADOX OF PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE**<br>C: Decouple public awareness and support for stepping forward<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring break the counterproductive effect of public awareness? |
| A | RESOURCE ALIGNMENT | **MISALIGNMENT IN QUALIA OF INDIVIDUAL CHANGE**<br>C: Reconcile nature of individual change with resource allocation cycles and logic<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring contribute to reconciling the nature of individual change with resource allocation cycles and logic? | **MISALIGNMENT IN ORIENTATION OF THE PROCESS**<br>C: Reconcile stepping forward process orientation with resource allocation cycles and logic<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring contribute to reconciling operational requirements with resource allocation cycles and logic? | **MISALIGNMENT IN OUTCOME OF FACILITATION**<br>C: Reconcile operational requirements and intended outcomes with resource allocation cycles and logic<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring contribute to reconciling operational requirements with resource allocation cycles and logic? | **TENSIONS IN PRIORITISING**<br>C: Reconcile policy priorities with service provision priority outcomes<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring contribute to reconciling policy agendas and service provision outcomes? |
| R | RECOGNITION | **"WE ARE THE OTHERS"**<br>C: Minimise self-marginalisation<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring contribute to counteracting self-marginalisation? | **SPIRAL DOWN BY AFFILIATION**<br>C: Avoid deviant thinking<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring counteract a spiralling down into deviant thinking? | **RECOGNITION OF REPLACEMENT SELF**<br>C: Construct direction, purpose and replacement self<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring contribute to constructing new sense purpose and replacement self? | **SOCIETAL INCONGRUENCE**<br>C: Construct legitimate replacement self in situation of societal incongruence<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring construct a legitimate path forward facing situation of societal incongruence? |
| T | MORAL TREATMENT | **"I AM WRONG"**<br>C: Change self-punitive mindset and habits<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring facilitate a change away from self-punitive mindset? | **PARADOX OF RIGHTING A WRONG**<br>C: Decouple recognition of at-risk from sense of moral wrongness<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring bring at-risk to light whilst minimising the sense of moral wrongness? | **VALIDATION OF SENSE OF WRONGNESS**<br>C: Legitimate restorative stepping forward in the absence of moral judgement<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring restore at-risk situation whilst minimising moral judgement? | **MORAL EXCLUSION**<br>C: Inclusive recognition of vulnerability<br>Q: How can entrepreneuring enable a more inclusive recognition of vulnerability, against societal moral exclusion? |

**Table 4: START Framework as published within practitioner report**

back into our research, helping to identify a need for a new research framework which worked across multiple levels and contexts.

## 4 Restorative Entrepreneuring: A new conceptual framework

As we look across spaces, our insights began to reveal complex, obstructive and at times detrimental situations that detract from the potential of both rehabilitation and entrepreneuring. But through doing so we uncover areas underlying a new approach to emancipatory entrepreneuring as it pertains to the rehabilitation of at-risk groups. We label this new approach *Restorative Entrepreneuring,* which we define as: *a set of entrepreneurial practices and a system of support that enable individuals at-risk to reconstruct their sense of ownership and self-worth and engage in a progressively autonomous rehabilitative life project, away from deviant behavior and out of detrimental and stigmatizing circumstances.* In Figure 2, we offer a model with elements underlying restorative entrepreneuring.

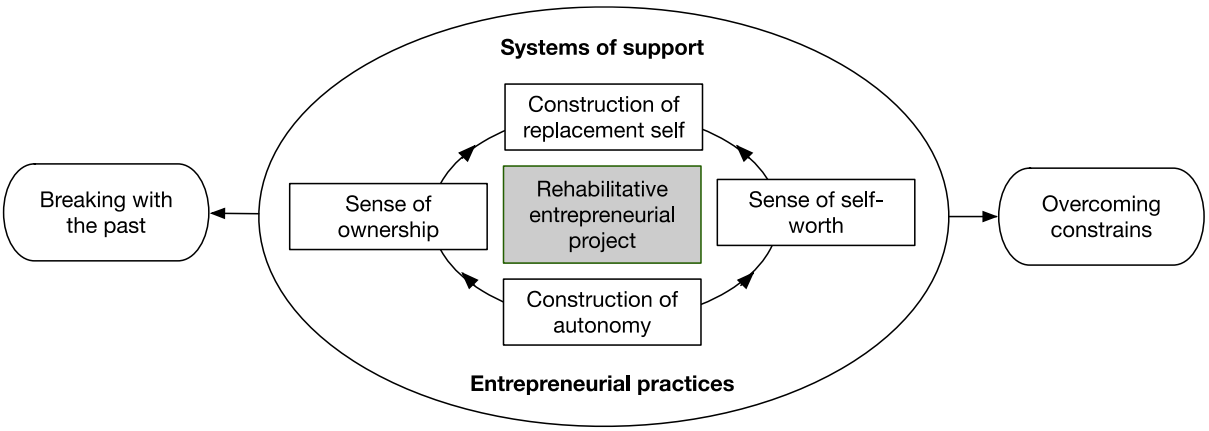


**Figure 2: Restorative Entrepreneuring Model**

In the following, we unpack our model drawing on both insights from service providers and relevant rehabilitation and entrepreneurship literature. To enrich our exposition, we present our framework in an abductive manner, through a conversation between theories and insights from practice.

### 4.1 Dimensions of restorative entrepreneuring

Restorative entrepreneuring identifies four conceptual spaces: Construction of autonomy, sense of ownership, sense of self-worth and the construction of a replacement self. These are constitutive parts of the rehabilitative entrepreneurial project, which in turn are facilitated by entrepreneurial practices and nurtured by systems of support. Through these dimensions entrepreneuring can play a role in minimizing self-reinforcing effects and the risk of them becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yet, its contribution to mitigating, alleviating or overcoming social problems will depend on more precise definition of the activity that is specific to rehabilitation and a delineation of research priorities that are embedded in rehabilitation and entrepreneurship research, as well as the reality of at-risk social groups.

Together, these dimensions can break the self-fulfilling cycle and offer an alternative way forward. This view of entrepreneurship involves the use of entrepreneurial skills and practices to solve social problems and enable changes in society. We embrace the notion of entrepreneuring because it is one that goes beyond the sole pursuit of opportunities for economic gain. This view departs from mainstream theory in terms of the focus upon change creation and the emphasis on constraints rather than opportunities (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016). It is about using change-orientated activities and projects with the aim of overcoming or removing perceived constraints in the individual's environments. It is about seeking autonomy, impetus, breaking free from authority, the removal of constraints and making declarations about the intended change (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009). It is an alternative type of entrepreneurial endeavour, pro-social in nature that has become prominent in social contexts facing challenging or threatening life circumstances. Entrepreneuring may evolve into self-employment, sole trading or start up activities, yet this is not assumed to be a necessary outcome that would determine the success of the process. Each of the four conceptual

spaces comprising restorative entrepreneuring will be considered in turn.

## 5 Restorative entrepreneurship and the construction of autonomy

The construction of autonomy refers to the regaining of an autonomous lived experience from a constraining power. Such a constraining power could take the form of an institution, an unchosen membership in a community, or an individual. In the context of Restorative Entrepreneuring, autonomy is reconstructed by helping individuals to move away from a self-punitive mindset by facilitating an enhanced sense of self-esteem, self-respect and self-trust.

Autonomy can be considered however in several respects. In the liberal sense, autonomy implies a removal of *any* constraint which could impede upon one's own 'pursuit of happiness', and as such takes an individualistic form, gaining independence from consociates in seeking self-reliance and self-sufficiency (Anderson and Honneth, 2005). This perspective of autonomy falls in line with that of the 'standard' approach, in that having autonomy is viewed as a mark of self-governance, "the ability of the person to guide her life from her own perspective rather than be manipulated by others or be forced into a particular path by surreptitious or irresistible forces" (Christman, 2014, p.373).

From the emancipatory entrepreneuring perspective, seeking autonomy is the process of striving to overcome and escape from the limitations which impede or eliminate independence through entrepreneurial action. These restrictions can be economic, social, or institutional. The pursuit of autonomy may also be seen as an effort to escape or overcome certain beliefs, customs, and practises; as such, it may occur on an ideological or perceptual level (Chandra, 2017). In this sense, the development of autonomy is essential to the emancipatory entrepreneuring process as it allows for the individual to be accountable for their own actions and intentions, displaying the ability to self-govern through entrepreneurial practices. Here emancipatory entrepreneuring finds congruence with 'relational autonomy', which

acknowledges that in order to maintain adequate levels of self-respect, self-trust and self-esteem (and therefore gain autonomy), one must consider themselves as equal in moral status to others (Anderson and Honneth, 2005). The construction of autonomy therefore is facilitated via interpersonal dynamics (rather than individualistic), with the 'surrounding others' acknowledging the status of the group/individual as answerable for their own actions (Benson, 1991). We observe this approach within emancipatory entrepreneurship literature. Al-Dajani et al., (2015) find the seeking of autonomy to be evident in their study of displaced Palestinian women in East Amman through the breaching of contract terms allowing for engaging with multiple intermediary organisations. By working together in an interpersonal manner, women gained a collective solidarity and autonomy in doing so. Chandra (2017) observes how through building pro-social relationships with various stakeholders, broadening social networks and developing role models, formerly ideologically oppressed terrorists regain a sense of autonomy whilst integrating into a community from which they were once marginalised.

Within rehabilitative research, developing autonomy is often focussed upon as a measure towards the successful reintegration into society. Bullock and Bunce (2020) discuss the merits of desistance theory and how within some prisons inmates are governed in such a manner as to encourage the development of agency, self-reliance and personal capacity as a form of self-governance. Within the Good Lives Model (GLM) (Ward and Brown, 2004), developing autonomy and agency is considered as a primary good. Based upon strengths of the at-risk individual, as opposed to encouraging the avoidance of certain behaviour, the GLM emphasises human agency, with those at-risk supported to accomplish a basic need, or primary good. Primary goods are defined as "the outcomes, states of being, or experiences that are valued by an individual and which contribute towards their overall level of well-being including their sense of happiness and fulfilment" (Fortune, 2018, p.24). From the perspective of the GLM criminogenic needs interfere with the successful attainment of achieving autonomy and self-

directedness. Treatment is therefore focussed upon helping to develop interpersonal prosocial capacities, skills and resources, whilst addressing any challenges to obtaining, maintaining and enjoying primary goods.

The construction of autonomy is recounted by practitioners as a key component for rehabilitation. Below a practitioner describes how the UK asylum process becomes so burdensome and marginalising that many resort to relying upon the benefit system to survive. The consequence of this is the removal of independence and the promotion of a 'learned helplessness' not unsimilar to the experiences of prison inmates:

> "we help over 300 refugee clients per year to move on with their social and economic integration after the grant of leave to remain. Empowering individuals to move forward with their lives is essential and we know many individuals who have chosen self-employment as a route out of the benefits system and the "learned helplessness" that the asylum process creates"
>
> *Operations Manager, Merseyside Refugee Support Network*

We also see evidence from practitioners of the impact of marginalisation of at-risk groups and the gradual removal of autonomy. Practitioners recount how as at-risk groups experience an erosion of self-respect, self-trust and self-esteem, parity with new 'surrounding others' from accepting sub-cultures takes precedence, as described here:

> "Some people lean on an issue, identifying with the issue and taking it as part of their identity. It can be a defensive move to pre-empt someone [else] labelling them as such"
>
> *Operations Manager, Inside Connections Support CIC*

From a service delivery perspective there is awareness of the risk of autonomy being removed as a consequence of the rehabilitative process. As recounted below, simple interaction with service providers is sufficient to begin stripping autonomy of the at-risk group via refusing to acknowledge the group as answerable for their own actions, instead applying marginalising labels which carry inherent vulnerability and fault:

> "At the cathedral we'll have the public when they see us commenting "oh you're helping homeless people?" and we reply that we're just helping people. We don't necessarily call people via their labels, but institutions do, they say they work with drug addicts, or people with mental health problems. That perpetuates the issue".
>
> *Executive Director, MICAH*

Without the appropriate contextual and environmental support the at-risk individual is likely to see rehabilitation not as a process to reconstruct autonomy, but as an attempt to right a sense of *wrongness*, which can be counterproductive in the context of emancipatory work. A key challenge to at-risk individuals seeking change and purpose lies in the conviction that through accessing support they are raising their head above the perceived parapet and signaling to the world that they are indeed what they presumed everyone knew they were. In the case of addicts for example, the sense of being worth less is validated by the 'surrounding others' of their context, since only an addict would access addiction support and addicts are judged as deviant.

In the context of Restorative Entrepreneuring, systems of support assist the process of accessing help by tackling at-risk situations whilst fostering a more inclusive recognition of vulnerability against societal moral exclusion. Through engaging with pro-social interpersonal networks via entrepreneuring, the at-risk group commence a process of enhancing their sense of autonomy. This is achieved through receiving recognition and acknowledgement from their 'surrounding others' as part of an ongoing intersubjective process whereby the individual's sense of independence emerges from their encounters with others and the other's perspectives towards themselves (Anderson and Honneth, 2005), a legitimising rehabilitative process.

### 5.1 Restorative entrepreneurship and sense of self-worth

Sense of self-worth refers to the tendency to establish and maintain a positive self-image (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002), based around an individual's feelings about their own abilities

and competencies (Erdogan et al., 2012). Self-worth is strongly correlated with self-esteem, in that self-esteem is centered around an individual's assessment of their performance in areas where they have staked their self-worth (Crocker and Wolfe, 2001). The development of a sense of self-worth counteracts the dehumanizing aspect of the rehabilitative process. In the context of Restorative Entrepreneuring, the approach allows individuals to break the self-stigmatization cycle which depletes their self-worth and re-humanize their rehabilitation process.

Within entrepreneurship literature the opportunity for positive impact upon self-worth at both the group and individual level is often explored in deprived settings such as refugee camps (Shepherd, Parida and Wincent, 2020) or rural villages (Mair and Marti, 2009), and has been discussed as an outcome of entrepreneuring (Brattström and Wennberg, 2021). Kantor (2002) examines the relationship between self-employment and self-worth for women who engage in microenterprises. Here the distinction is made between necessity entrepreneurship and 'free choice' entrepreneurship, with the potential for achieving an increased sense of control alongside facilitating improved self-worth increasing when opportunity can be freely capilatised upon (Kantor, 2002). The link between venture creation, success and self-worth is investigated by Spivack, McKelvie and Haynie (2014) who find that the self-concept of the entrepreneur becomes entwined with that of the venture, potentially posing a risk of producing a habitual addiction. As the venture achieves success, feelings of self-worth increase alongside a strong sense of validation as well as "intense focus, overall well-being, superiority, mental intoxication, power, and joy of living or surviving" (Spivack, McKelvie and Haynie, 2014, p.660), all exacerbated by the persistent feedback entrepreneurship offers.

Within rehabilitation research and as informed by practitioners, developing self-worth is a key attribute to counteracting marginalization. At the individual level detrimental circumstances are recognized, internalized and transferred to the person's identity (Wakeman

and Rich, 2018), with the individual 'self-labelling' as 'other'. As society deems the cause for their particular support need as incongruent to the norms, values and beliefs (e.g. to be addicted to drugs), the individual becomes not only aware of their vulnerability, but also of the negative connotations narrated by society which the self-labelling implies. To counteract this requires a normalization of marginalizing labels, as described by one practitioner:

> "We need to normalise these issues and labels to allow for people to be viewed beyond their label. They might be an 'asylum seeker' but they go shopping, they get the bus, they have family, they are just like anyone else. Until normalisation happens people will continue being stigmatised, and the media does not want to normalise issues as it doesn't sell"
>
> *Transition Coach, The Basement Advisory Centre*

This presents a challenge to the systems of support and the potential for emancipation, as the process of normalization which includes exposure and discussion of a stigma, prevents many at-risk individuals from seeking support for fear of 'outing' oneself to their community. In the case of addicts for example, addiction is often portrayed as a *willful choice*, not a disease; addiction treatment is situated *outside* of the medical system, and *specific language* is used to discuss 'addicts'. With support services commonly provided by the third sector, taking part in rehabilitation removes the individual from society, both conceptually and physically, weakening relationships to community and in turn promoting structures of inequality (Wakeman & Rich, 2018). Individuals exist within a 'zone of uninhabitability' where they have no status in social life (Butler, 1993), excluded from the rest of society for fear of contamination, representing a symbolic link between a moral failure and worthlessness (Watson and Cuervo, 2017). As the individual attempts to transition out of their situation, the facilitation of rehabilitation often obscures them through the labelling of the condition or circumstance. A key challenge lies in the *fashionability* of particular labels, the public seems more interested in *homelessness* than the *homeless person*. This exposes a key duality. While bringing these issues to the attention of the public (normalization) may lead to funding or policy

changes, it also increases the risk of further dehumanization. While the media is the best conduit to bring these issues to light, at-risk individuals are often represented as *folk devils*: "people whose very existence is socially constructed as posing a negative challenge and a grave threat to morality and who, as a result, provoke feelings of fear" (Brisman et al., 2017, p.177). By portraying stories in this manner, often linked to crime and deviance, the media are able to not only create *deviants*, but also victims. One practitioner describes how this 'threat' translates into public discourse:

> "Of the roughly 82,000 prisoners all but a small proportion of those will be released. That includes people who have been committed of a sexual offense, and within that category are 17-year-old lads who have slept with their 15-year-old girlfriend who they've been with for two years. But also with them are serious sex offenders. There needs to be an element of common sense to understand that despite their labelling, they are different cases. Yet they are viewed under that same umbrella, the same for 'homelessness' and for 'addiction'"
>
> *Operations Manager, Inside Connections Support CIC*

Such exposure to society impacts upon the individuals ability to maintain some sort of control over privacy of one's personal space in both the physical and emotional sense (Young, 1997). The loss of such privacy detrimentally disempowers the individual, weakening autonomy and self-worth, fostering a reluctancy to seek out support. This in turn begets further vulnerability, deepening the extent of the detrimental context, increasing the evidence the individual needs to disbelieve in their abilities and competencies (Pritchard-Jones, 2018).

From a Restorative Entrepreneuring perspective, systems of support can assist the process of developing a stronger sense of self-worth, by relabeling the transition out of at-risk circumstances and decoupling the counterproductive effect of bringing rehabilitation closer to the public through a normalizing pathway of entrepreneuring. The facilitation of Restorative Entrepreneuring decouples the conception of being 'at-risk' or 'vulnerable' from the intrinsic notion of the individual being to blame for their issue, in the sense that they cannot or will not support themselves. Restorative Entrepreneuring provides an enabling process, both raising

public awareness of the at-risk context, whilst also raising visibility of the pro-social actions being taken.

## 5.2 Restorative entrepreneurship and sense of ownership

A sense of ownership refers to seeking and taking ownership of one's own actions and narrative, and as such could involve appropriating ready-made narratives, behaviours and discourses to competently partake in a social system (Gherardi, 2015). Through achieving a sense of ownership an at-risk individual or group can transition from a position of being exploited within a *disempowering social system*, to one of creating rules and taking action (Chandra, 2017).

In the context of restorative entrepreneuring it allows individuals to achieve an earlier visualization of the at-risk situation and increases the sense of capability in taking ownership over the at-risk situation.

Within rehabilitative literature, the temporal aspect of taking ownership is critical. Often the individual approaches the service provider at a stage of desperate need, beyond the point of when detrimental circumstances first arise (Wakeman and Rich, 2018). The problem lies with the individual not recognizing the chain of events playing out before them. In the case of drug addiction, for example, the concept of class and identity come into stark effect. Recreational drug users, usually white-collar workers, do not fit the destitute stereotype of an 'addict', nor are they self-aware of having an addiction until a *crisis point* occurs (Artz, Green and Heywood, 2021). Even at this stage, emergency can be masked with the continuance of a socially acceptable routine which meets the societal expected norms and values – employment, household bill payment, business attire, consumerism, following of laws, relationship maintenance – perpetuating the myth of a non-addict identity (Bender and Theodossiou, 2014).

One service provider describes the challenges of identifying those at-risk of addiction due to the ability to adopt the norms, narratives and behaviours of a society creating the *appearance of ownership* of an at-risk situation:

> "A mum from a wealthy area who drinks a bottle of wine a day is not frowned upon, but a single mum, from a deprived area who's got a can of Stella – that's a social services issue, but the lady in the nice house who drinks with her friends is a different situation"
>
> *Young Persons' Worker, Young Addaction Liverpool*

When the at-risk situation does eventually become tangible, service providers are faced with a very complex layered situation which may have evolved to include criminal activity, significant financial difficulty, relationship breakdowns or poor health (Brezina and Topalli, 2012). The process of rehabilitation therefore often begins after several life crises have taken place, with earlier opportunities to tackle root causes more directly missed. This complex mix results in a need to unpick layers of symptomatic consequences. An individual who was once an employed alcoholic, is now a homeless alcoholic drug user in significant debt. Challenge rests in the externalizing conducted by at-risk groups, where the individual creates a perceptual distance between themselves and the at-risk scenario, perpetuating a lack of *at-risk ownership*.

From a system of support perspective, service providers report a difficulty in facilitation which relies upon the individual presenting themselves for support, as opposed to the service provider *proactively* being aware of an issue as it evolves, as described by the service provider below:

> "We can make our service as accessible as we can, but there's a personal challenge of even getting to the front door, we go out to them in the local community but they've still got to come to our door and they've still got to come in and that can be a massive obstacle, whether it be family circumstances or their own kind of resilience, it's their own personal challenge to go 'I need help' and it's that kind of, admitting that 'I need help' – and it can link to stigma as being some sort of weakness or a failure of some sort"
>
> *Transition Coach, The Basement Advisory Centre*

Two separate service providers explain how some of those falling into an at-risk situation display a lack of awareness of the severity of their situation due to an established normalization of detrimental issues, delaying or preventing issue ownership:

> "Some people will think 'Do I have an issue? Everyone in my family occasionally has a spliff, is it even an issue?'"
>
> *Children and Young People's Wellbeing Practitioner, Young Persons Advisory Service*

> "If a child is growing up in a household where their dad drinks alcohol every single night, then they don't think that when they're seventeen and they're having a lager - they don't think that that's a problem, it's completely normal"
>
> *Executive Director, MICAH*

A lack of issue identification and ownership continues a cycle of *reactionary* action for service providers, which in turn skewers the perception of rehabilitative support services in their function and role to wider society. This is exampled with societal perceptions of mental health issues increasing (Holding et al., 2020; Jia et al., 2020), issues which service providers have long been attempting to address alongside their core provision in spite of the prior lack of mental health provision and visibility, resulting in an expectation for homeless shelters to deal with mental health support despite lacking the funding to do so. One service provider describes the problem with reactionary action, the impression it gives to funders and the societal expectations of service delivery below:

> "Funding is always given as a delayed reaction, so it's coming 18 months or 2 years too late, it's [any current issue] looked at almost when it's become a crisis as opposed to preventative measures. And because that's the way it's happening there is always going to be something else to turn your money to because they're [policy setters and funding bodies] not preventing things from happening, they're reacting to something that's already entrenched within society, that's why funding is always chopping and changing in society, as a result it's never being given long enough to make an impact - it's trying to put a plaster over a war wound".
>
> *Operations Manager, Inside Connections Support CIC*

Once a process of self-awareness has begun and rehabilitation commenced, research has

shown the self-awareness of stigma at-risk individuals possess can continue to be a significant barrier to emancipatory work (Garcia-Lorenzo, Sell-Trujillo and Donnelly, 2021; Adeeko and Treanor, 2022). At a societal level, we discovered a support paradox. In an attempt to shine a light on and identify the 'vulnerable' within a community, and as such become aware and *knowing* of who requires support (whether intended or not), society aids in perpetuating the socially constructed *folk-devil* threat, reducing any value the at-risk individual may hold. For example, asylum seekers, who enter the UK under threat and at a base human level are requiring support, are not identified as *valued individuals*. 'Asylum seeker' is not a label which carries with it the same connotations as a 'doctor' would; as a 'teacher' would; as a 'plumber' would. However, these labels could also be assigned to an individual who is also an asylum seeker. This is the paradox for providing support, as the more aware and knowing society is of an at-risk group, the more inclined it is to reduce support.

From a Restorative Entrepreneuring perspective, systems of support assist the process of moving from a stage of at-risk unawareness to at-risk ownership, by expanding the visibility and reach of service providers to engage with potential at-risk groups much earlier, and in doing so, decouple the counterproductive effect of public awareness and stigmatisation.

### 5.3 Restorative entrepreneurship and the construction of a replacement self

Constructing a replacement self relates to the process of identity formation in at-risk groups. It involves the way through which they come to see themselves in a particular manner in relation to their surrounding others, and the role the process, facilitation and context play in identity formation. In the context of restorative entrepreneuring it allows for counteracting marginalization and 'othering' and enabling a repositioning of the self to better face and navigate societal expectations.

Across levels is the notion of 'othering', i.e. "a set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities" (Powell & Menendian, 2016). Othering is an expected response in societies experiencing change. In these situations, people tend to narrowly define who qualifies as a member of society and, in consequence, who does not. "Othering is not about liking or disliking someone. It is based on the conscious or unconscious assumption that a certain identified group poses a threat to the favored group" (Powell, 2017). Service providers describe the impact othering has upon at-risk groups and the challenges they face when attempting to overcome such marginalization. One service provider explains how the process of facilitation forces the at-risk person to self-identify as the 'other':

> "The shame of not wanting to say that "I'm an 'addict'"… It's a very powerful word"
>
> *Young Persons' Worker, Young Addaction Liverpool*

A second service provider explains how self-aware at-risk individuals are of their status and the impact this has upon the effort willing to be applied to affect a positive life change:

> "For some ex-offenders it is easier not to try than to try and fail. Many are scared individuals when they leave prison, scared of being rejected by society"
>
> *Operations Manager, Inside Connections Support CIC*

The process of othering tends to be experienced in a passive, gradual and subtle manner (Robinson, 2014). As discussed above, events may be unfolding in the life of the individual which would unknowingly (to them) begin to place them as 'at-risk'. As negative events continue to unfold, they observe and recognize within themselves, patterns and habits displayed by others (at-risk). As this happens, they engage in a process of reflexive self-marginalization, "a process whereby the self is reflexively constructed through what it is not" (O'Mahoney, 2012, p.7), leading to seeing themselves as being 'the others'. As the 'othering' process is not prevented or redirected through early provider intervention, subsequent negative patterns

continue to develop, reinforcing the 'othering' and likely leading the individual to a life crisis. At this stage they become 'othered'. The individual evolves from being distinct from and possibly opposed to those who make up a stigmatized group, to an awareness of no longer existing within the societal norms, values and beliefs regarding legitimate behavior. This is a challenge as not only do they recognize themselves as incongruent to society, but they also recognize and internalize society's incongruence towards them, being made invisible by society whilst attempting to adapt to the disparagement, producing a self-reinforcing cycle (Baker and Welter, 2018, p.146).

As at-risk individuals are unintentionally portrayed as "the others", some respond by re-identifying with the stigmatized subculture (e.g. homelessness, serial offending). In search of acceptance some individuals distance themselves from society through self-actualizing their label and by creating an opposition mindset, displaying an 'established lifestyle' (e.g. of homelessness) and not wanting to experience 'failure' while attempting to move forward (e.g. rehousing support). Such self-reinforcement is acknowledged by service providers who describe the impact of othering and the self-internalization of what it can mean to be unemployed:

> "We very rarely come across anyone who is faking it. But there are areas where there is a culture of sitting on benefits"
>
> *Executive Director, MICAH*

This becomes reprimand avoidance, remaining dismissive of support and developing distain towards societal convention. Attempting to work with such groups is difficult as it requires the at-risk individual to re-engage with an institution operating within the society from which they experienced rejection, and to consciously reject negative social groups which validate their lifestyle. Robinson (2014) describes how local communities are often pitted against at-risk groups who are perceived as placing a drain on already limited community resources, resulting in restricted access, entitlement and denying services.

The motivation to seek support and the development of a sense of purpose are critical for the development of a new replacement self (Davis et al., 2012). In this sense, the individual who intentionally wants to overcome difficulties requires either a pull towards seeking purpose within legitimate institutions, or a pull towards an established detrimental lifestyle.

Systems of support assist this process by constructing a new sense of purpose, facilitating the construction of a replacement self and by offering a legitimate path forward which can traverse through societal incongruence. The 'other' of the entrepreneur is embraced (Visscher, Heusinkveld and O'Mahoney, 2018), and through doing so the individual can be embedded back into society and back into the web of social mechanisms.

## 5.4 Interactions between dimensions

> "The themes we discussed are consistent amongst both statutory and voluntary services. They are themes that are so predictable that it is now, I feel, dangerous water we are treading as a society. System change is needed at absolutely every trajectory of multiple complex needs, with huge cultural shockwaves that must be felt throughout organisations, which I hope will be the catalyst in positive differences and outcomes experienced by the people we work so hard for"
>
> *Operations Manager, Merseyside Refugee Support Network*

Through discussion and review, practitioners and researchers have identified four conceptual spaces comprised of 16 dimensions for the rehabilitation of at-risk groups. While each of these dimensions can by themselves enable EE, we observe that they tend to act in conjunction, reinforcing each other and likely supporting individuals to break from the past as they overcome constraints and detrimental circumstances.

The combined reinforcement of dimensions is seen in the relationship between constructing autonomy and developing a sense of self-worth. Through entrepreneurial action, surrounding others begin to witness intentionality, engagement with pro-social institutions, and a set of behaviours which display capability. From doing so the insinuation of intrinsic fault

and blame regarding the at-risk situation changes as a new label begins to be applied, the individual moves from being perceived as ‘less than’ to ‘equal to’ as efforts made to engage with societal norms and civic culture in pursuit of entrepreneurship are validated.

As the ‘social contract’ of collectively enforced social arrangements are viewed by others as being upheld, positive reciprocity can take place based upon trust “where one agent who takes an action to benefit another agent encourages a beneficial act in return” (Besley, 2020, p.1309).

The consequence of this for the at-risk individual is an inner experience of self-respect and self-esteem increasing, as belief in the capability to entrepreneur is, over time, repeatedly validated by others within their growing network, sustaining self-worth. This interpersonal dynamic relationship pulls the ‘othered’ from a position of being outside of the accepted community standards, and through acknowledgement, becomes pulled into the community, recognised as an autonomous individual. As individuals begin to engage in entrepreneuring therefore, they begin to develop a sense of self-worth which is evidenced back to them through the behaviours and interactions from their surrounding others.

As the at-risk individual experiences an internal transition from being othered to being recognised as autonomous within a community, acknowledgement and ownership (or lack thereof) of detrimental behaviour begins to change. In order to continue a validated autonomous lived experience within a social system, the at-risk individual must transition from cultivating ownership of ‘deviant’ behaviours which disempower the self, towards cultivating ownership of decision making which better navigates a social structure and empowers the self.

In doing so the individual experiences a redirection of the detrimental self-fulfilling prophecy. Previously anti-social behaviour produced marginalisation, othering, and reduced self-worth with a reluctance to accept ownership of the at-risk context, which produced more

anti-social behaviour in a downward spiral. However engaging in entrepreneurship produces tangible positively validating feedback. This takes the individual from a position of lacking ownership over an at-risk situation, to seeking ownership over decision making and actively engaging with intention and consideration to produce a pro-social experience (validation, credibility, skills endorsement etc). We see here the impact of the inter-related nature of restorative entrepreneuring with the visible signalling of behaviour ownership, positively impacting upon the wider context of public awareness as intentionality becomes evident. This process enables a change in labelling, creating a hybridisation of labels in the public mindset – the individual is no longer just an e.g ex-offender, they are now an ex-offender entrepreneur, someone who is applying their experiences towards a pro-social opportunity. A consequence of this is a mindset change which decouples the counterproductive effect of bringing rehabilitation closer to the public conscience. Although not many people may be willing to support someone who has just walked out of prison, possibly more would support an *entrepreneur* who was *formerly* an offender.

The development of a replacement self is not possible however without effectively growing autonomy, taking ownership of decision making and narrative, as well as experiencing an enhanced sense of self-worth. The extent and relative success of each dimension augments the scale and impact of the replacement self and the cognitive distance felt from a potentially deviant or stigmatised past. With sufficient cognitive distance a 'temporal landmark' (Dai, Milkman and Riis, 2014) can be established, marking the end of one life period bracketed by societal incongruence, and the commencement of another bracketed by societal acceptance, experienced as a fresh start opportunity and a braking from the past, overcoming constraints.

## 6 Discussion

Emancipatory entrepreneuring exploits the use of entrepreneurial skills and practices for marginalised and disadvantages groups to change their maligned position within society, and potentially the social order itself (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009). While this perspective has reframed entrepreneurship to focus upon the 'doing' of entrepreneurial activity rather than venture creation or economic self-improvement, it offers little to tackle the messy interconnected nature of rehabilitation within a disempowering societal context. As such, our current knowledge and practices seem insufficient to address the multi-level challenges identified by practitioners in their attempt to use entrepreneurial tools to support at-risk groups. This constrains not only the scope of action of both practitioners and academics, but also our collective capacity to support vulnerable groups through rehabilitation and entrepreneuring.

We argue that the realisation of the potential of emancipatory entrepreneuring would be possible if we, researchers and practitioners, decisively engage with the many questions that remain unanswered at the intersection of at-risk social groups, rehabilitation, entrepreneuring and emancipation. This requires a systematic mapping of areas of inquiry and development, and a new research framework which we contend is found with restorative entrepreneuring. The development of restorative entrepreneuring has a variety of important implications which we discuss here.

## 7 Theoretical contributions

Within emancipatory entrepreneuring literature, the rehabilitative nature of overcoming constraint and marginalisation is not an evident component of thematic conversation discussing at-risk groups and those oppressed. Although there is growing literature exploring the impact of constraint e.g, ideological (Laclau, 2016; Chandra, 2017), patriarchal (Al-Dajani and

Marlow, 2013), institutional (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016), religious (Juergensmeyer, 2017), economic (Hammad and Tribe, 2020), there remains a theoretical gap in acknowledging the dynamic relationship between the at-risk individual (mindset, skills, decisions and actions), their systems of support, including families and support organizations, and the context of their constraint more broadly.

Restorative entrepreneuring has the ability to act across themes and levels and in so doing affect change to the at-risk groups position within the social order itself (Rindova et al., 2009). Similarly, when contrasted to the "entrepreneurship as emancipation" (EE) approach, restorative entrepreneuring offers a broader view, addressing the nature of emancipatory work being rough, uneven, and full of unanticipated challenges, which has constrained the scope of action of both practitioners, academics, and our collective capacity to support vulnerable groups through rehabilitation and entrepreneuring. It does so by introducing to the literature core elements of rehabilitation theory, namely: the avoidance of deviant behavior and the restructuring of mindset in pursuit of personal goals.

Additionally it allows for a conceptual expansion and further specificity around the needs of at-risk social groups, beyond the emphasis of EE on the removal of constraints. Leveraging the pro-social labelling of 'entrepreneurs' (Högberg et al., 2016), restorative entrepreneuring facilitates embedding the individual back into society and the highly contextual web of social mechanisms involving entrepreneurial networks through which entrepreneurial actions can be played out upon (Tobias, Mair and Barbosa-Leiker, 2013). Within the empirically informed conceptual framework we offer a set of entrepreneurial dimensions which facilitate a reconstruction of identity, sense of ownership and self-worth and the engagement in a progressively autonomous rehabilitative life project, allowing for advancing both rehabilitation work and emancipatory entrepreneuring with at-risk groups.

## 8 A map to navigate interventions: Practical implications

Through undertaking citizen science with rehabilitative practitioners, we shine light upon the 'grand challenges' facing service provision, as well as the enablers of action, in order to better understand how entrepreneuring can act as a process of pro-social change. After refining insights from the scoping workshop and the feedback received from participants, we were able to identify 16 dimensions of emancipatory entrepreneuring and the challenges they respond to within the rehabilitative ecosystem which constitute a cross-disciplinary, practice-based research agenda to support at-risk social groups[1]. We argue that the idea of *restorative entrepreneuring* and derived framework mark a beginning for novel cross-disciplinary conversations at the intersection of entrepreneurship and rehabilitation and action-oriented collaborations between scholars and practitioners to collectively advance rehabilitation work and emancipatory entrepreneuring in at-risk groups.

The framework is thus of practical and conceptual importance. For practitioners, it offers a systematized view of their daily challenges and a map to navigate through them, as it considers the realities of both at-risk individuals and the support infrastructure facilitating a restorative entrepreneuring process, as well as the broader social and political context. These statements also constitute an invitation to explore how practitioners can use rehabilitation and entrepreneuring together to develop, test and implement innovative ways of organizing, delivering interventions and thinking about alternatives out of detrimental life circumstances. We believe *restorative entrepreneuring* can be a legitimate and potentially powerful mechanism for service providers and the at-risk groups they support, in tackling the challenges they face. A wondering into "how can *restorative entrepreneuring* contribute to their work…" should ignite collective action.

[1] While these emerged in conversations with practitioners in the north of the UK, we believe they reflect a broader reality, since the causes, consequences and mitigating actions for addiction, homelessness, re-offending and alike are relatively similar across contexts. Thus, questions can be generalized and examined in other regions.

## 9 A roadmap for future research

The restorative entrepreneuring framework draws attention to the gaps in knowledge surrounding emancipatory entrepreneuring and its application as a rehabilitative process. By drawing out the complexity of challenges at-risk groups face in attempting to emancipate, we highlight opportunities for future research in this area. Looking across table 3 – *Emancipatory Entrepreneuring rehabilitative framework,* we can observe dimensions requiring either further development to increase our understanding of how emancipation occurs, or brand-new research into an as yet unexplored area of inquiry, as with how 'EE rehabilitation is enabled by an increase in the sense of ownership over the at-risk situation'. Guided by the aggregate insights, we hope this framework provides a roadmap for further research into aspects of emancipatory entrepreneuring, focusing upon how both the entrepreneurial practices and as equally important (yet often overlooked) systems of support can facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration process for at-risk groups.

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## Chapter Three - Entrepreneurship, Emancipation and the Construction of Autonomy Under Extreme Constraints


### Abstract

A rise in emancipatory entrepreneurship research has drawn attention to the various detrimental contexts in which entrepreneuring can play a role in overcoming oppression. Very little is known however about the processes leading to emancipation, the origins of autonomy, and the interaction between individual and context, in particular with regards to contexts where autonomy is removed. To tackle this issue, we used process tracing methodology to study the prison journey of eleven inmates, who developed entrepreneurial careers within a prison. Contrary to current understanding, our findings reveal that emancipation and entrepreneurship do not necessarily work in conjunction and that seeking autonomy can initiate in extremely restrictive contexts through working the context and expanding the 'opportunity-action space'. We uncover a dynamic relationship between agents and constraint, with autonomy developing whilst progressing through a two-stage process of exploring then exploiting the 'fractures' of constraint. Our research makes significant contribution to emancipatory entrepreneurship theory by bringing to light the emergence of action spaces within spaces of constraint and by revealing and theorizing the process of autonomy construction as an early enabler of emancipation. Our research reveals that the construction of spaces – material and perceived - where people can act, are as relevant as the entrepreneurial actions generally prescribed to deal with resource constraints.



*Keywords: Emancipation; entrepreneuring; action-spaces; dynamic constraint; autonomy construction*

A version of this paper was presented at the 2021 Babson College Entrepreneurship Research Conference

# 1 Introduction

For many individuals, entrepreneurship plays a central role in not just their occupation but also their lived reality within contexts of constraint (Joseph and Selvaraj, 2010; Al-Dajani et al., 2015; Chandra, 2017; Sopranzetti, 2017). Research has highlighted this relationship in various detrimental contexts including for those experiencing extreme resource scarcity (Hota, Mitra and Qureshi, 2019), patriarchal societies and institutional voids (Mair and Marti, 2009; Heilbrunn, 2019). Rindova, Barry and Ketchen (2009) called attention to such restricted groups who create positive change via entrepreneurial pursuits. They use the term 'emancipatory entrepreneuring' (EE), in reference to the "efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or group of individuals" (p.477). In doing so, focus is placed upon the acts that individuals carry out and the processes they go through in seeking to transition from negative situations.

Although emancipatory entrepreneurship research is growing, very little is known about the processes leading to emancipation and the interaction between individuals and the restrictive context. This is problematic in two ways. First, literature tends to over-emphasize the acts that individuals carry out, neglecting the role of constraints, which are often viewed in a static sense (Goss et al., 2011) leading to reductive approaches that fail to provide analysis across multi-levels (Williams et al., 2020). Second, it assumes that emancipation and entrepreneuring work in conjunction as individuals at-risk seek to overcome constraints, overlooking what enables emancipatory processes. This creates a problem in understanding the origins of emancipatory entrepreneurship, as the individual is engaging with constraints.

In Rindova et al.'s (2009) view, emancipatory entrepreneuring begins with seeking autonomy, where entrepreneurs attempt to overcome the constraints that limit their independence. In doing so, entrepreneurs can own their situations and strive for change. Yet, in certain contexts, e.g., slavery, imprisonment, or tyranny, the removal of limits to independence seems impossible to achieve. In such contexts, just showing the intention to gain

autonomy can be detrimental and potentially lead to punishment. We wonder how a process can even initiate if an essential pre-condition is unachievable.

To tackle these issues, in this paper we set out to explore the circumstances and actions preceding emancipatory entrepreneurship and the relationship between constraints and entrepreneurial individuals in the construction of autonomy. We focus on the UK prison system, as it provides a uniquely restrictive context in that material restriction appears fixed, severe, and omnipresent regardless of prisoner behaviour. As argued by Sparks, Bottoms and Hay (1996), Sykes (2007), and Bullock and Bunce (2020), prison enforces near total power over inmates and induces dependency, indeed the very purpose of prison is to remove liberty and heavily restrict agency. We studied the prison journey of eleven individuals, who over time became known for "being entrepreneurial" to their peers and the researchers through establishing business-like initiatives from within prison. Interviews were conducted shortly after being released from prison; thus, we were able to capture the experiences of individuals who not only engaged in entrepreneurial activity during their sentence but also began to produce an emancipatory outcome through doing so.

Leveraging life story research (Leung, 2010; Kevill et al., 2015), we reconstructed their experiences from the moment they were incarcerated to their release (~4 years), focusing on circumstances, actions and events – both positive and negative – identified by them as central to their emancipatory journey. We coded and analysed key events using process-tracing methods (Muñoz, Cacciotti and Cohen, 2018; Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte, 2019) to discover a unique process preceding entrepreneurial actions and the realization of emancipatory outcomes. We found that participants actively 'work' apparently fixed constraints, in comparison to those who return to deviant behaviour where constraints seem to prevail (Steiner and Wooldredge, 2018; Wooldredge, 2020). This process is comprised of two stages, 'exploring constraints' and 'expanding constraints', with six constituent parts, preceded by all inmates with an acknowledgement of trauma. This process enables the expansion of

opportunity action spaces and the construction of autonomy.

This study makes three contributions. First, we extend emancipatory entrepreneurship theory by revealing and theorizing the process of the construction of autonomy as an early enabler of emancipation. Our findings show that entrepreneurship and emancipation do not necessarily work in conjunction and that seeking autonomy can initiate in extremely restrictive contexts by working the context and expanding the action-opportunity space before entrepreneurial actions can materialize. We argue that by doing so, would-be entrepreneurs develop a dynamic relationship with constraint, helping them to progress from a perception of restriction to one of opportunity. We also contribute to a broader understanding of emancipation in disadvantaged settings, where overcoming constraint tends to be conceptualized at the level of resources.

Our research brings to light the emergence and role of opportunity-action spaces. We reveal that the construction of such spaces – material and perceived - where people can act, is as relevant as the entrepreneurial actions generally prescribed to deal with resource constraints. Our findings also have significant practical implications for the rehabilitation of offenders, providing evidence for 'goal orientated' models of rehabilitation such as the Good Life Model (Fortune, 2018) which promotes life goal aspirations as a device for avoiding reoffending. Through these results we see clear evidence of how entrepreneuring fosters a strong sense of purpose beyond the prison context, aiding in reducing reoffending.

## 2 Background literature

### 2.1 Emancipatory entrepreneuring process under extreme constraints

The entrepreneurial emancipation (EE) perspective has been discussed by many as a solution to social hardships (Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019), and has been applied to a variety of constraining and restrictive contexts including institutional voids (Mair and Marti, 2009; Heilbrunn, 2019), war and conflict (Cheung and Kwong, 2017; Kwong et al., 2019), natural disaster relief (McMullen and Kier, 2016) and patriarchal societies (Al-Dajani et al., 2015;

Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016; Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018). To be emancipated is to experience an act of being set free in order to pursue liberty or social resources previously restricted by a controlling influence (Laclau, 2016). Rindova et al., (2009) explain emancipatory entrepreneuring "as efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or group of individuals" (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009, p.477). In doing so, focus is placed upon the acts individuals carry out and the processes they go through in seeking to transition from negative situations. From this perspective individuals make use of entrepreneuring "to disrupt the status quo and change their position in the social order in which they are embedded—and, on occasion, the social order itself" (p.478).

EE is traditionally considered to have a positive effect, given its emphasis on prosocial entrepreneurial action, where the "efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or group of individuals" (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009, p.477) can potentially lead to positive societal change (Williams and Shepherd, 2016; Farny et al., 2019).

However, the emancipatory potential of entrepreneurship has not been without critique. First, literature tends to over-emphasize the acts that individuals carry out, neglecting the role of constraints, which are often viewed in a static sense (Goss et al., 2011) leading to reductive approaches that fail to provide analysis across multi-levels (Williams et al., 2020). Second, it assumes that emancipation and entrepreneuring work in conjunction as individuals seek to overcome constraints, overlooking what enables emancipatory processes. It assumes free agency within meritocratic, accessible free markets, whereas it may instead recreate the conditions of restriction from which emancipation is sought (Datta and Gailey, 2012; Scott et al., 2012; Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Verduijn et al., 2014; Ahl and Marlow, 2021). Scholars question the often presumed emancipatory and transformational outcome of the enactment of entrepreneurship, where it is seen as a self-directed means to gain emancipation (Korosteleva

and Stępień-Baig, 2020; Williams et al., 2020).

Reflecting on the above shortcomings – the neglect of a dynamic relationship with constraints and the concurrent occurrence of emancipation and entrepreneuring - we argue that there is a third problem requiring examination. This pertains to the antecedents of the emancipatory entrepreneuring process, what occurs before individuals begin to own their situations and strive for change. In Rindova et al.'s view, emancipatory entrepreneuring begins with seeking autonomy. Only once autonomy is achieved, taking ownership of one's own actions and interactions via authoring can be enacted, which then enables making declarations, as the "unambiguous discursive and rhetorical acts regarding the actor's intentions to create change" (p.485). This means that an examination of antecedents of the EE process requires turning our attention to the pursuit of autonomy under constraints.

### 2.2 Entrepreneurship, emancipation, and rehabilitation

To make sense of the role emancipatory entrepreneuring plays in the context of at-risk groups and the rehabilitative process they go through, the idea of *restorative entrepreneuring* has been introduced. It is defined as a 'set of entrepreneurial practices and a system of support that enable individuals at-risk to reconstruct their identity, sense of ownership and self-worth, and engage in a progressively autonomous rehabilitative entrepreneurial project, away from deviant behaviour and out of detrimental and stigmatizing circumstances'. This notion advances EE in several ways.

First, it offers a broader view that incorporates the at-risk individual (mindset, skills, decisions and actions), their systems of support - including families and support organizations, and society more broadly. In doing so, it addresses the nature of emancipatory work being rough, uneven, and full of unanticipated challenges, which generally constrain the scope of action and the collective capacity to support vulnerable groups through rehabilitation and entrepreneuring.

Second, in conceptually expanding EE beyond the removal of constraints, restorative

entrepreneuring facilitates embedding the individual back into society and the highly contextual web of social mechanisms involving entrepreneurial networks through which entrepreneurial actions can be played out upon (Tobias, Mair and Barbosa-Leiker, 2013).

Third, restorative entrepreneuring leverages core elements of rehabilitation theory to bring together EE and the process at-risk individuals go through, namely: the avoidance of deviant behaviour and the restructuring of mindset in pursuit of personal goals.

The construction of autonomy is a central component of restorative entrepreneuring and the theory it draws upon, i.e., emancipatory entrepreneuring. It is the starting point of Rindova et al.'s (2009) emancipatory process and an integral part of the 'progressively autonomous rehabilitative entrepreneurial project'. Despite the relevance of autonomy however, little is known about how it is constructed by entrepreneurs under extreme constraints in their efforts to rehabilitate and emancipate. We now turn our attention to the theoretical underpinnings of autonomy construction, to explore the origin of the gap we argue exists.

### 2.3 Seeking autonomy in emancipatory processes

Autonomy as a concept can be considered in several ways. Crocker and Wolfe (2001) describe autonomy as "dependent on independence, personal freedom, and achievement" (p.598). Ryan and Deci (2000) refer to an "organismic desire to self-organize experience and behavior and to have activity be concordant with one's integrated sense of self" (p.231). It has been defined as the desire to experience choice and psychological freedom (Vansteenkiste, Niemiec and Soenens, 2010). Murray (1938) introduces the notion of a controlling influence, describing the need for autonomy as a desire "to resist influence or coercion. To defy an authority or seek freedom in a new place. To strive for independence" (p.82). Autonomy in this sense falls in line with that of the 'standard' approach, in that having autonomy is viewed as a mark of self-governance, "the ability of the person to guide her life from her own perspective rather than be manipulated by others or be forced into a particular path by surreptitious or irresistible forces" (Christman, 2014, p.373). Seeking autonomy could also be considered as pursuing a route to

break free from the values, norms and practices of a place which restrict autonomy and as such could take place at an ideological or perceptual level (Chandra, 2017). Within the realms of business literature, gaining greater autonomy from a controlling institution has been linked to positive individual outcomes such as lower turnover (Annink and den Dulk, 2012) and increased employee well-being (Wu, Griffin and Parker, 2015). Within entrepreneurship research the recognition of entrepreneurs seeking autonomy as a primary goal above financial gain is growing in recognition (Hmieleski and Corbett, 2008; Baron, Franklin and Hmieleski, 2016), providing greater opportunity to develop meaning in the work they perform. Chatterjee, Shepherd and Wincent (2022) argue this is particularly so for women entrepreneurs who "tend to place greater value on subjective performance measures that are not at the firm level of analysis (vis-`a-vis their male counterparts)" (p.3).

Gaining autonomy is a key component of emancipatory entrepreneuring. To achieve emancipation, Rindova et al., (2009) discuss what they consider three key aspects involved in the process, i.e. seeking autonomy, authoring and making declarations. Through seeking autonomy entrepreneurs attempt to overcome and escape from the constraints which limit or remove independence, constraints which could be viewed as economical, societal or institutional. In this context, the construction of autonomy is a central part of the emancipatory process, as it enables authoring and making declarations. The latter two cannot be enacted until a sense of autonomy is developed.

In certain contexts however, the removal of what limits independence seems impossible to achieve. This is the case, for example, of slavery, tyranny or imprisonment. The latter is particularly relevant in this regard, as it is a uniquely restrictive context where material restrictions appear fixed, severe, and omnipresent regardless of prisoner behaviour. The very purpose of prison is to remove autonomy and heavily restrict agency. Even more, just showing the intention to gain autonomy in such contexts can be detrimental and potentially lead to

punishment.

We wonder how an EE process for an individual can even initiate if autonomy, as an essential pre-condition, seems unachievable. We know however that emancipation is possible in such contexts, as evidenced in the experience of individuals that undertake entrepreneurial activities in prison (The Centre for Entrepreneurs, 2016). This is a known phenomenon and is valued in rehabilitation programmes as it increases the chance of good behaviour and early release and reduces the chances of reoffending. This constitutes a black box in the early stages of the process, raising questions as to how autonomy is constructed under extreme constraints.

## 3 Methods

EE has been criticized as often carrying an implicit a priori ethical perspective of entrepreneurship (Dey and Steyaert, 2016), with Blackburn and Ram (2006) arguing for a need to maintain "a perspective based on evidence rather than idealized notions" (p.76). Inspired by this statement, we decided to tackle our research question using life story research; a methodological approach capable of revealing the longitudinal nature of the prison experience, the dynamic role context itself has played in restriction, as well as the salience of the actual process to the participant (Elliot, 2005; Singh, Corner and Pavlovich, 2015). As discussed by Morris, Kuratko and Spivack (2012), how sensemaking of entrepreneurial events is undertaken and processed, affects the entrepreneurs affective state, in turn affecting behaviour and decision making. As such to take a snapshot perspective would miss a dynamic and temporal process driven by unfolding events, risking misinterpretation of experiences which effect the participants construction of a lived reality.

Life story research entails collecting and analyzing data pertinent to a period of time in participants' lives rather than their whole life. Focus is placed upon discourse, the pattern of events which frame the time period and how they connect. As an overall plot is established, participants actively reflect to make sense of themselves as actors within it, as well as the actions which took place. Participants in this study were guided to recall the key high and low

events which covered the period of imprisonment, however, following Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012) the interview was taken wherever the participant-led it in line with the overall research question in order to discover highly salient perspectives.

Life story interviews were combined with graphic elicitation in the form of co-created timelines, combined to map out not only the order of events, but the salience afforded to each. As the narrative is built and events are logged, 'way-points' are included, notes of particular interest recorded, explanatory lines detailed, and world events of consequence added in. This improves the accuracy of chronologically-ordered accounts and thus aids in reducing retrospective bias. In addition, the use and building of the timeline allows us to gain access to areas of experience, traditionally elusive when using conventional interview questions alone.

The use of 'co-created' timelines in particular has distinct advantages when attempting to gather recalled experiential data. It provides a dynamic non-linear process to chronologically map out key events, whilst allowing the interview to progress non-chronologically (Söderström, 2020). From the outset the timeline delineates the scope of the interview for the participant, encouraging focus (Bravington and King, 2019). By employing both the vertical and horizontal axes, event salience can be captured whilst linking together key events, providing a much richer and more detailed account of the experience as participants actively compare and evaluate events during data collection.

The use of a visual task also aided in what Bagnoli (2009) refers to as "going beyond a verbal mode of thinking" (p.565), especially helpful when working with participants who are now entrepreneurs experienced in providing stock ready-made answers about their start-up journey. Such an approach is particularly suitable for discussing sensitive or challenging subject matters, as timelines create a visual artefact which can act as a point of entry into narrative experiences just by pointing to events and asking for further detail (Neale, Henwood and Holland, 2012; Kolar et al., 2015). For at-risk participants who have undergone traumatic life-changing events such as committing a crime, being convicted in a court, being imprisoned,

undertaking extreme stress and for some people violence, time may not be thought of as linear and progressive. Many people who have served time inside prison recall a stalling of time, how life on the 'outside' carries on whilst it stops for them inside (Cope, 2003; Garner, 2020; Murray, 2020). Such accounts are supported by psychological research with depressive patients who describe time slowing down, a 'depressive time' experience (Cavaletti and Heimann, 2020).

Further research has discussed a phenomenon labelled 'temporal-binding' whereby events thought to be causally related are perceived as occurring much closer together than they may be (Blakey et al., 2019), distorting time periods and sense-making processes. Additionally, for vulnerable participant groups, the interactivity of timelines has been found to facilitate "a sense of participant comfort and momentum" (Kolar et al., 2015, p.25) within interviews with focus placed on both positive and negative events, capable of displaying progress and a sense of balance. Timelines allow participants much greater scope to share contextual details, drawing out their life stories across the 'middle ground' of the timeline, as opposed to being put on the spot within an interview (Kolar et al., 2015).

### 3.1 Research context, sampling strategy and participants

We focus on the UK prison system, as it provides a uniquely restrictive context in that material restriction appears fixed, severe, and omnipresent regardless of prisoner behaviour. It represents a context which enforces restriction, removes agency, liberty and resources, as well as produces an antagonistic environment which disempowers the individual (Maruna, 2001; Kjelsberg, Skoglund and Rustad, 2007; Bullock and Bunce, 2020). Within the prison system it is known that there are inmates already enacting entrepreneurialism (The Centre for Entrepreneurs, 2016), presenting a highly suitable context in which to focus our research. Inmates and ex-offenders who have undertaken entrepreneuring represent a particularly interesting group, as the term 'ex-offender' covers an often complex population composed of individuals with mental health issues, drug addiction issues, suffering from homelessness, high

unemployment rates, and composed of a wide range of ethnic minority backgrounds (Maguire and Raynor, 2017; Keene et al., 2018).

The selection criteria required all participants to have served time inside prison for crimes not related to serious violence including murder, sexual offences, terrorism or serious organized crime. Although these categories were not exhaustive in their exclusivity, they did provide opportunity to find participants with similar sentence timeframes and similar prison contexts, offering parity of experience. All participants were required to have undertaken entrepreneuring whilst inside prison by either commencing some sort of business-like venture by committing their ideas to a plan of action, or to have displayed entrepreneurial activities to affect a positive life change. Finally all participants had to have been released. To gain access to this population sampling was undertaken via initial gatekeepers from two UK northwest organizations who work with entrepreneurial ex-offenders, and then via snowball procedures amongst participants. Snowball sampling was especially suitable concerning the sensitive data of interest which for many would require a sense of trust and legitimacy in the researcher's intentions before agreeing to an interview which may have involved discussing a traumatic time period.

The selection process produced eleven individuals, ten men and one woman. Detail of participant attributes is given in table 1. Of those who began to develop business ventures, these included a prison magazine, an apprentice training organisation, two ex-offender recruitment agencies, a DIY book publishing company, a television production company, and a skills training centre for young people out of education, employment or training. The remaining four participants all undertook entrepreneuring in the manner of either identifying franchisee opportunities with a national employer and then pursuing this through network building, skills training and risk-taking (three participants - two of which actually began employment whilst in prison during day release), or they leveraged established network contacts to begin forging an employment opportunity upon release with a nationwide

demolition company, cultivating trust, communication, reputation and capability whilst in prison (one participant).

| Participant | Age | Gender | Crime | Sentence Duration | Example of Entrepreneuring |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 45 - 50 | Male | Possession of Class B Drugs | 2 years | Vocational Training Academy |
| 2 | 35 - 40 | Male | Common Assault | 1 Year | Prison Magazine Venture |
| 3 | 45 - 50 | Male | Conspiracy to Supply Class A Drugs | 6 Years 9 Months | DIY Book Publishing Company |
| 4 | 45 - 50 | Male | Conspiracy to Supply Class A Drugs | 9 Years 6 Months | Skills Training Venture |
| 5 | 30 - 35 | Male | Supply of Class B Drugs | 2 Years 2 Months | Ex-Offender Recruitment Venture |
| 6 | 35 - 40 | Male | Supply of Class C Drugs | 2 Years | Television Production Company |
| 7 | 40 - 45 | Female | Possession of Class B Drugs | 9 Months | Franchisee Manager Training |
| 8 | 40 - 45 | Male | Fraud | 2 Years | Ex-Offender Recruitment Venture |
| 9 | 45 - 50 | Male | Conspiracy to Supply Class A Drugs | 6 Years 6 Months | Franchisee Manager Training |
| 10 | 30 - 35 | Male | Conspiracy to Supply Class A Drugs | 8 Years 6 Months | Franchisee Manager Training |
| 11 | 25 - 30 | Male | Conspiracy to Supply Class A Drugs | 8 Years | Leveraged employment opportunity |

**Table 1 – Participant Profiles**

Sentencing time for our participants varied in relation to the type of offence, with a majority being in relation to drug dealing. The average sentencing time for our sample is 5.3 years. One of our participants had prior entrepreneurship experience before turning to criminal activity (drug dealing) leading to their arrest and imprisonment. Two further participants had criminal lifestyles involving drug dealing before imprisonment, the remaining eight participants were all imprisoned upon their first offence and came from employed occupations.

### 3.2 Data collection

EE is never perceived in a static sense, with events taking place in continuous motion towards or away from the liberation of the group or individual (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009; Hjorth, Holt and Steyaert, 2015). To deal with EE as a process, we leverage life story research

(Tagg, 1985; Singh, Corner and Pavlovich, 2015) to capture and reconstruct the experiences of participants from the moment they were incarcerated to their release, focusing on the circumstances, actions and events – both positive and negative – identified by them as central to their entrepreneurial journey.

Interviews were arranged directly, with the lead researcher discussing the use of timelines and the interview process beforehand with the participants. Consent forms were provided and signed with any questions answered at the outset. An example of how timelines could look was provided to each participant as a tool to help better understand the process and to stimulate creative engagement and flexibility in how the co-creation of the timelines could be undertaken (Kolar et al., 2015).

Interviews commenced by helping participants set a benchmark by rating where they would score themselves on the day of imprisonment, the day of the interview, and then at the time which they consider to be a point of reflection commencing the entrepreneurial pathway. This 'bookend rating' helped to set a standard of comparison making reflective recall a more comprehensible process. To allow for cross-sample comparison, once each event was described a request was made for the participant to rate it in terms of saliency from -100 (negative experience) to +100 (positive experience). The use of life story interviews in conjunction with co-created timelines helped participants to make sense of their own story, how it changed over time, as well as to account for the broader socio-cultural patterns which occurred during the transformational process and impacted perception (Elliot, 2005). As the interview progressed it was led by the participant, yet kept in line with the overall research question, in order to uncover highly salient perspectives.

Data collection was conducted between December 2020 and January 2022, with interviews conducted across six months, with each participant taking part in up to three sessions: an initial 'key event' data collection lasting up to one hour, a second more in-depth interview lasting up to 90 minutes with short term goals discussed, and a third interview three months later to revise

the completed timeline, discuss the success or adjustment of stated short term goals, and to seek any further detail or clarification. The first round of interviews was conducted shortly after being released from prison; thus, we were able to capture the experiences of individuals who not only engaged in entrepreneurial activity during their sentence but also began to produce an emancipatory outcome through doing so.

The co-construction of timelines within life story interviews is logistically challenging. We used video calls, screen sharing and collective drawing software. This allowed for greater accuracy in timeline data collection, giving the participant control over where to place a marker signifying event time and salience. The virtual distance also aided in candidness with participants, who took part from a quiet, private space at home with only voices recorded. Hosting such sensitive interviews at home rather than in a formal workplace setting also helped participants to access and link together their life stories across themes from personal to professional, with for some participants the very home they spoke from featuring as part of their life story, and as such influencing the level of event saliency afforded.

## 4 Abductive data analysis

We analyze EE mindful of it being a recursive process characterized by a dynamic relationship between the agent and the constraint, whereby one can only be constrained through a context of constraint, and a constraining context can only be so by virtue of someone being constrained. As such, we can situate emancipatory phenomena in space and time, allowing for a greater understanding of how change occurs (Tobias, Mair and Barbosa-Leiker, 2013). Responding to the gap in knowledge concerning the process of emancipation, we take an abductive data analysis approach. Abductive research "refers to an inferential creative process of producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence. A researcher is led away from old to new theoretical insights" (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012, p.170). Our abductive data analysis is divided into five iterative stages: four inductive and one deductive. Through this stage-wise process, we were able to develop descriptive inferences and identify critical

junctures, focal points and empirical regularities across timelines (Muñoz, Cacciotti and Cohen, 2018).

### 4.1 Process tracing analysis

Within our staged process of data analysis, we draw upon process tracing. Process tracing theorises a causal mechanism, observed over time, based upon a series of connected components deemed necessary to explain an outcome (Befani and Mayne, 2014). Here we seek to identify sequence evidence, whereby components present as a temporal sequence of linked intermediary effects, which when observed together, provide diagnostic evidence and confidence of a casual mechanisms existence (Collier, 2011).

***Stage 1*** begins during interview one, where timelines were initially plotted with broad labels by the participant to avoid disrupting the flow of narration. The first author then revisited each graph after each interview to listen back to the audio and where necessary clarified labels and positioning to help with analysis. Once any relabeling or additional plotting was completed graphs were sent back to participants for agreement or revision of terms. This process was repeated during interviews two and three (Figure 1).

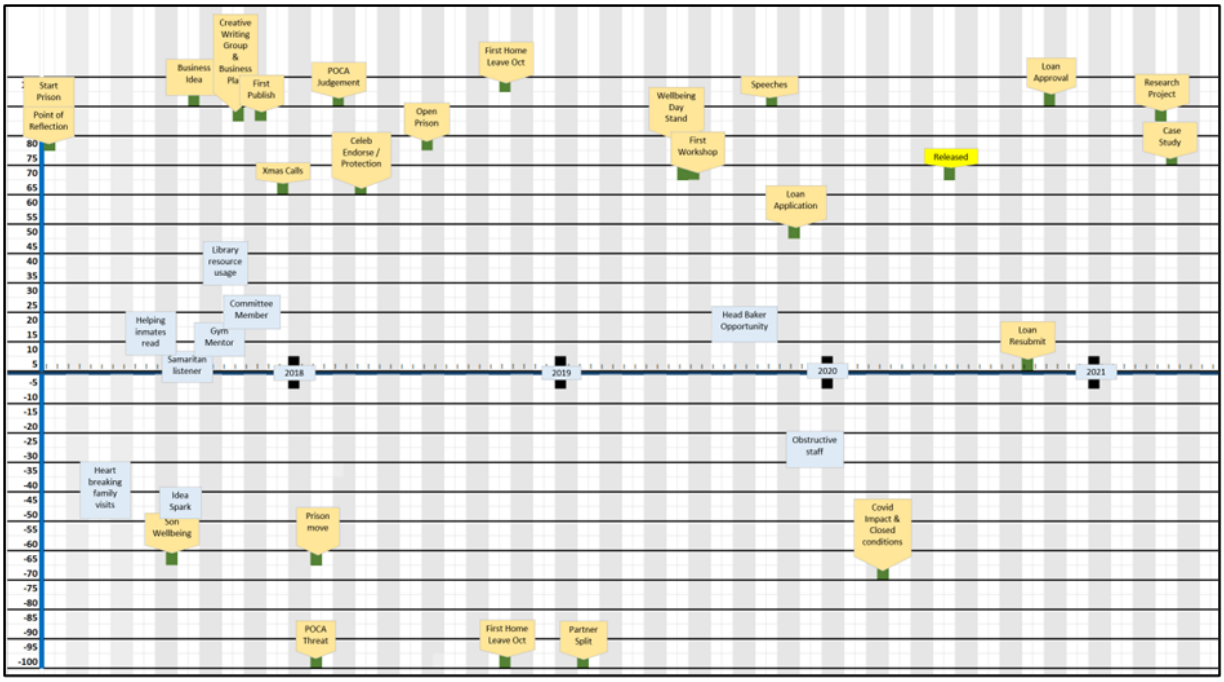



**Figure 1: Example participant three timeline – yellow labels representing in-interview labelling, blue labels representing clarified data**

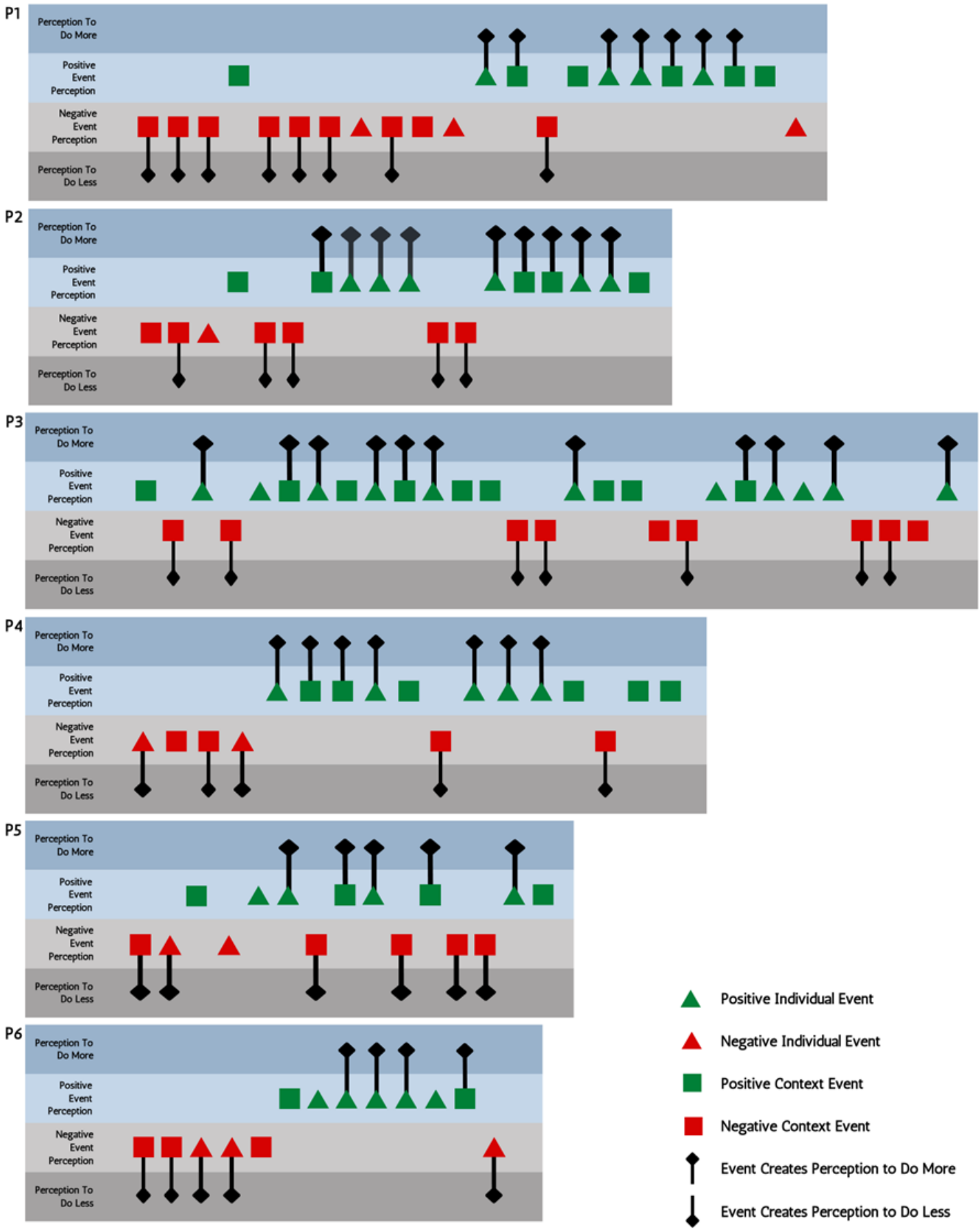
In ***Stage 2***, we used process tracing methods to code the events in the timelines using three markers informed by autonomy theory. Following Ryan and Deci (2000) who define autonomy as an "organismic desire to self-organize experience and behavior and to have activity be concordant with one's integrated sense of self" (p.231) – marker 1 is considered as whether the experience linked to the event is evaluated as positive or negative to the participants sense of self. Following Murray (1938) who describes autonomy as a desire "to defy an authority or seek freedom in a new place. To strive for independence" (p.82) – marker 2 is considered as whether an event it is attributed to the individual (agent) or external circumstances (context) in relation to emancipation. Finally, following Christman (2014) who includes "the ability of the person to guide her life from her own perspective" (p.373) in the description of autonomy - marker 3 considers whether participants perceive they can do more or less as a consequence of the event (Figure 2). For example, participant one experienced periods of anxiety, boredom and stress brought on by perceptions of sentence duration (negative context), as well as episodes of positive staff appraisal (positive context), alongside physical violence with other inmates (negative agentic) and gaining a role as a Gym Orderly (positive agentic). Each of these experiences produced a perception of being able to enact more or less agency. Through this analysis, we realized that across cases, the process moves from negative to positive experiences, as individuals gain control over events and their experiences and thus their emancipatory process. Additionally, some periods of time are perceived by participants as being more or less restrictive or opportunistic.

In ***Stage 3***, we coded the events using axial coding, moving from exploratory coding of events to aggregate dimensions using time brackets (Figure 3). In doing so, it became evident that there were distinct periods when entrepreneuring did and did not take place producing 'gaps', and periods of clustered business-like activity. For example, in participant 1 we observe a long chain of events where control is felt to have been lost, to then be followed near the end of their process map by business like activity. Participant 2 however displays a much shorter collection of events whereby control is felt to be lost, followed by a period of business-like

activity. This mechanism is observed across cases, with the commencement of entrepreneuring arbitrarily defined, evidenced from the spread of business-like activities originating within the middle to the end of participant event process maps rather than at the start. Here, we came to discover that the 'construction of autonomy', as the first expression of emancipation, does not begin with entrepreneurial actions, but rather with the experience and recognition of 'temporal landmarks' (Dai, Milkman and Riis, 2014) and the conscious decision to perform 'helping actions' which allow them to move away from deviant behaviour. In the case of participant 6, for example, a period of feeling constrained by context is displayed with a series of events experienced as control being lost, followed by a resetting and reflection event, with the participant taking stock of their situation and choosing to effect change. This reflection ends the stage of time feeling as though it has stalled, commencing a new epoch of opportunity to do more, marked by a temporal landmark and the commencement of a series of helping actions.

In ***Stage 4***, we focused on the examination of empirical regularities across cases (Figure 4). The coding of events created sequences of codes across participants' timelines. The role of this third analytical stage was to identify patterns of sequences, which allowed for discovering and theorizing on causal chains. We observe across cases that despite their being unique within-case causal chains, across cases patterns of events repeat. For example participant 3 within figure 3 displays a rapid acknowledgement of constraint, followed by a resetting and reflection upon the extent of confinement, to quickly commence helping actions which is interspersed with events which induce a sense of control being lost, being gained, and business-like activities commencing. Contrasted to participant 10 in figure 3, here we observe a longer initial duration of time feeling stalled due to a series of events where control is felt to be lost, but then after a resetting and reflection event we see less events considered as either business like or as gaining control. However, across both, and all other cases we do find a chain of events which appear in regularity, highlighted across cases in figure 4. These present as experiencing an initial temporal landmark upon entering prison, followed by an acknowledgement of constraint, and then a second temporal landmark when an event occurs which causes opportunity to reflect

and reset upon the current sense of time standing still, which in turn is followed by an initial helping action, and only after these events, the commencing of business like activities.


P1
Perception To Do More
Positive Event Perception
Negative Event Perception
Perception To Do Less
P2
Perception To Do More
Positive Event Perception
Negative Event Perception
Perception To Do Less
P3
Perception To Do More
Positive Event Perception
Negative Event Perception
Perception To Do Less
P4
Perception To Do More
Positive Event Perception
Negative Event Perception
Perception To Do Less
P5
Perception To Do More
Positive Event Perception
Negative Event Perception
Perception To Do Less
P6
Perception To Do More
Positive Event Perception
Negative Event Perception
Perception To Do Less
Positive Individual Event
Negative Individual Event
Positive Context Event
Negative Context Event
Event Creates Perception to Do More
Event Creates Perception to Do Less

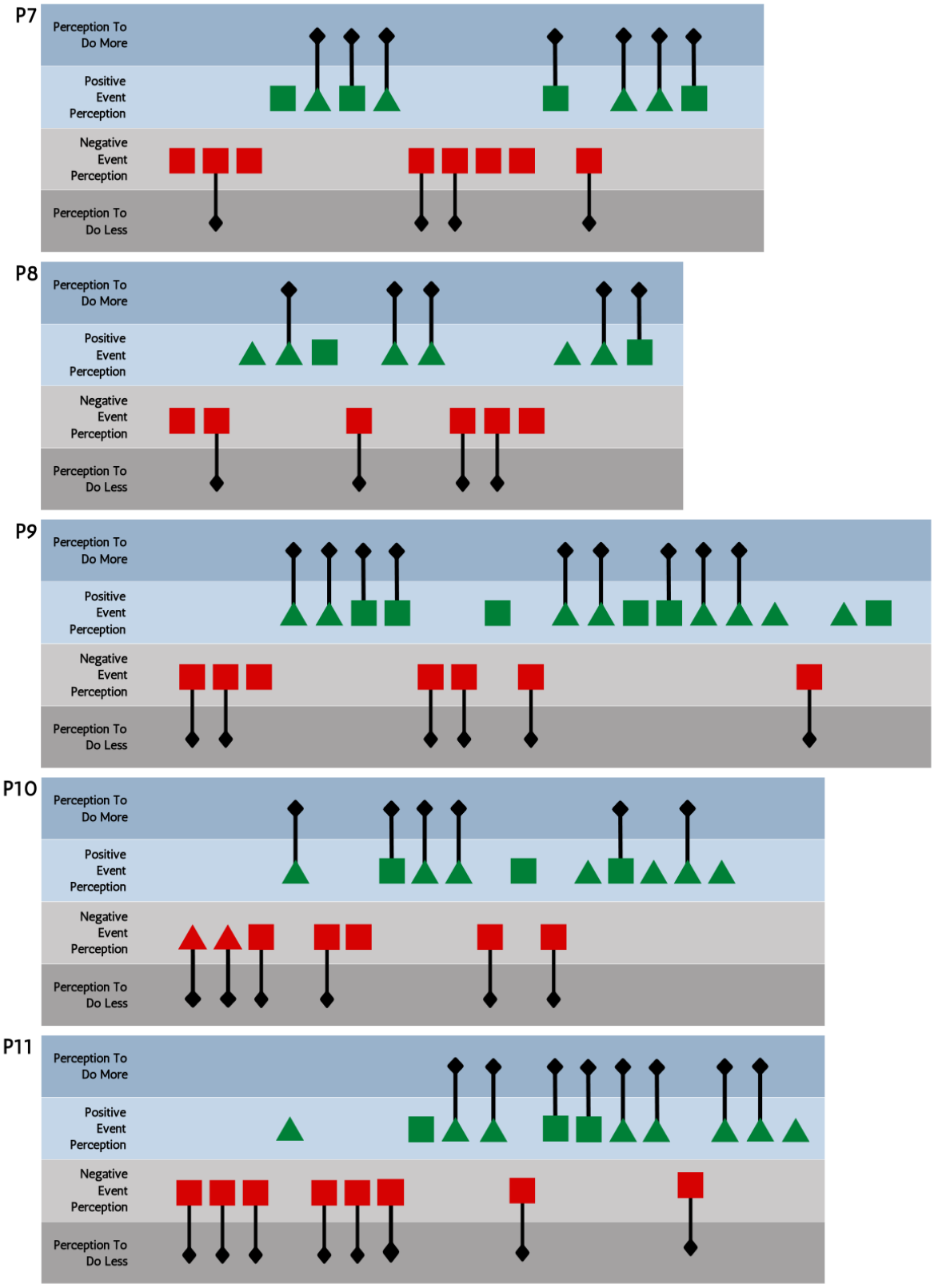
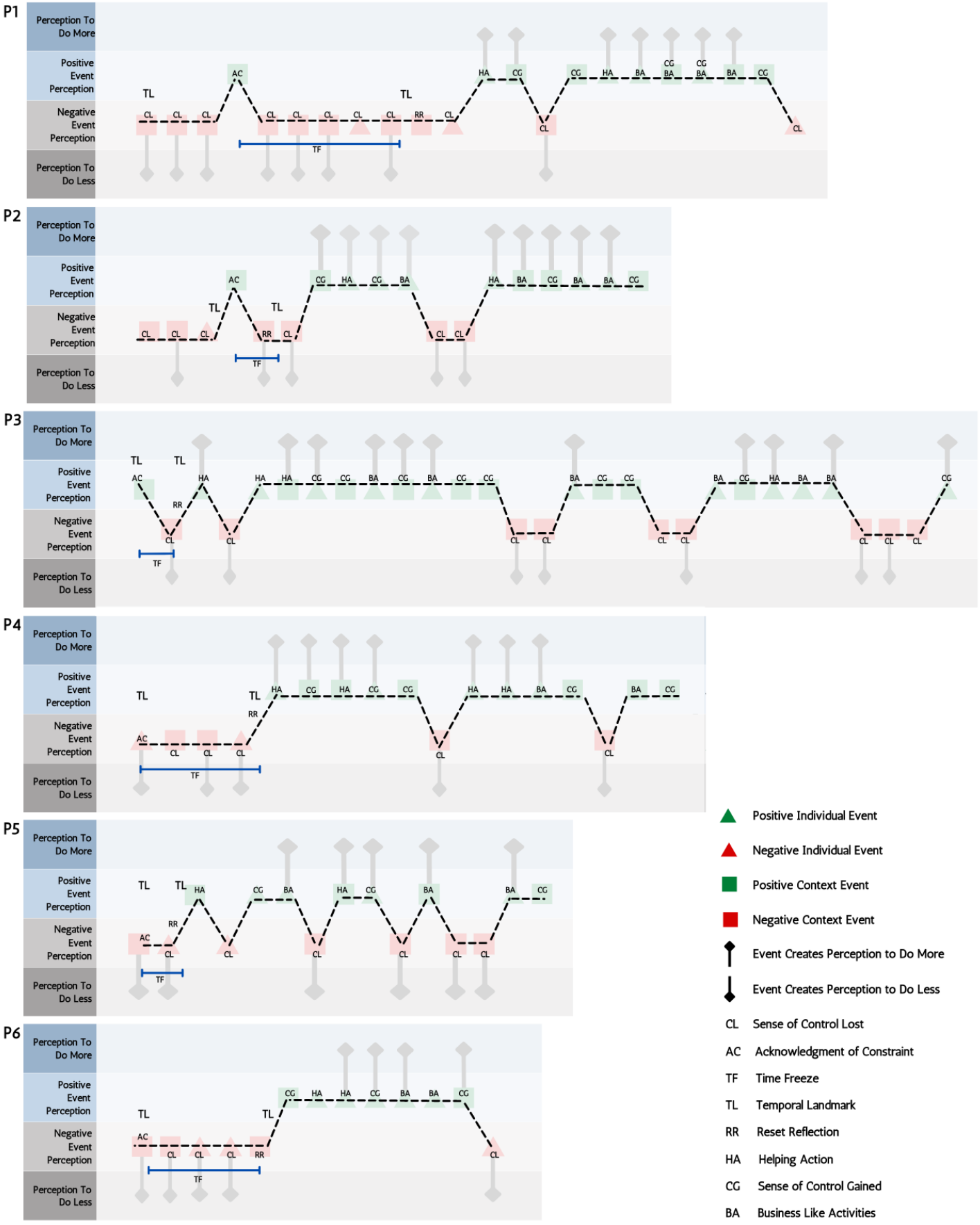



**Figure 2: Coding two dimensions**


P1
P2
P3
P4
P5
P6
Perception To Do More
Positive Event Perception
Negative Event Perception
Perception To Do Less
Positive Individual Event
Negative Individual Event
Positive Context Event
Negative Context Event
Event Creates Perception to Do More
Event Creates Perception to Do Less
CL Sense of Control Lost
AC Acknowledgment of Constraint
TF Time Freeze
TL Temporal Landmark
RR Reset Reflection
HA Helping Action
CG Sense of Control Gained
BA Business Like Activities

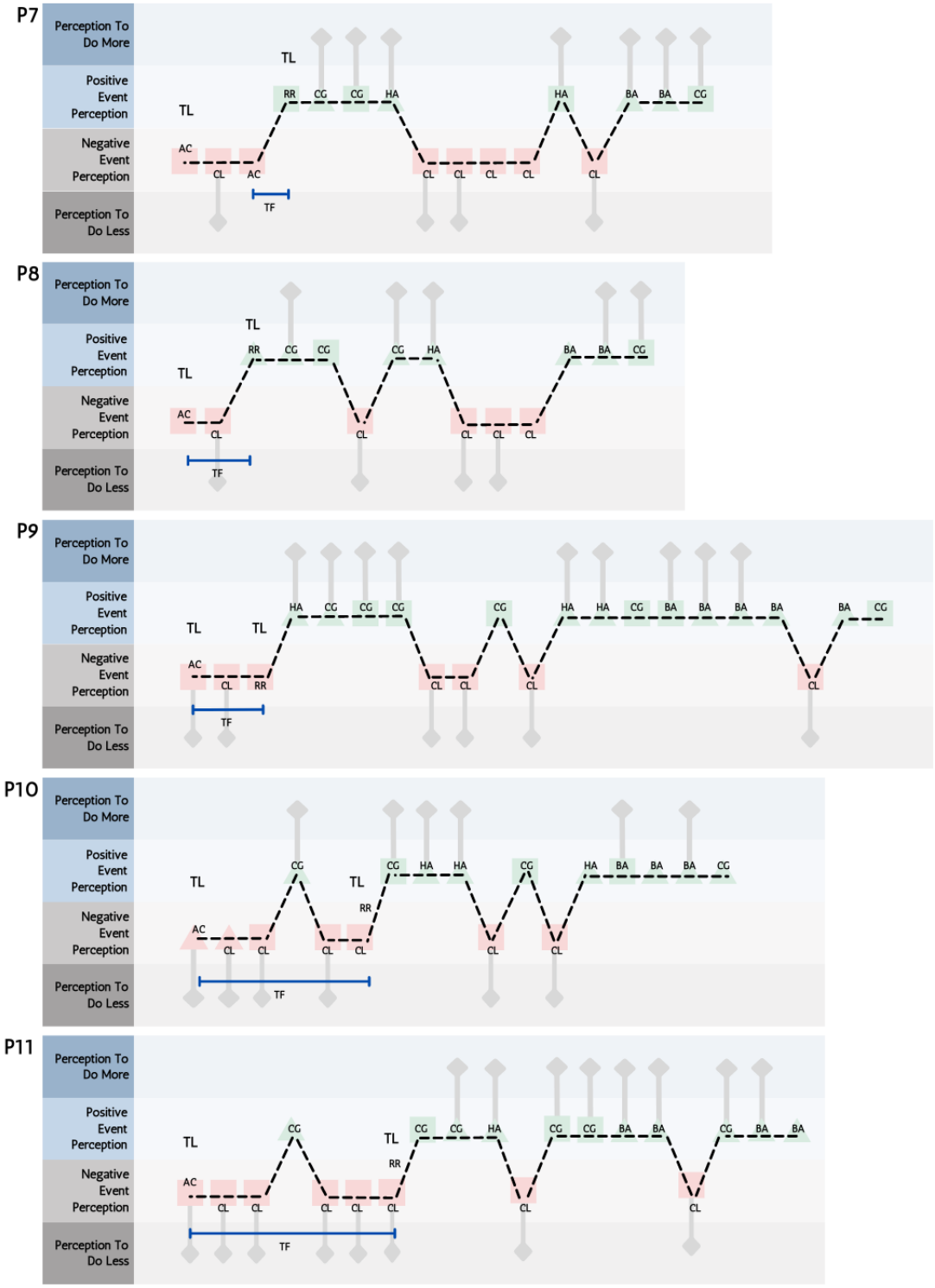
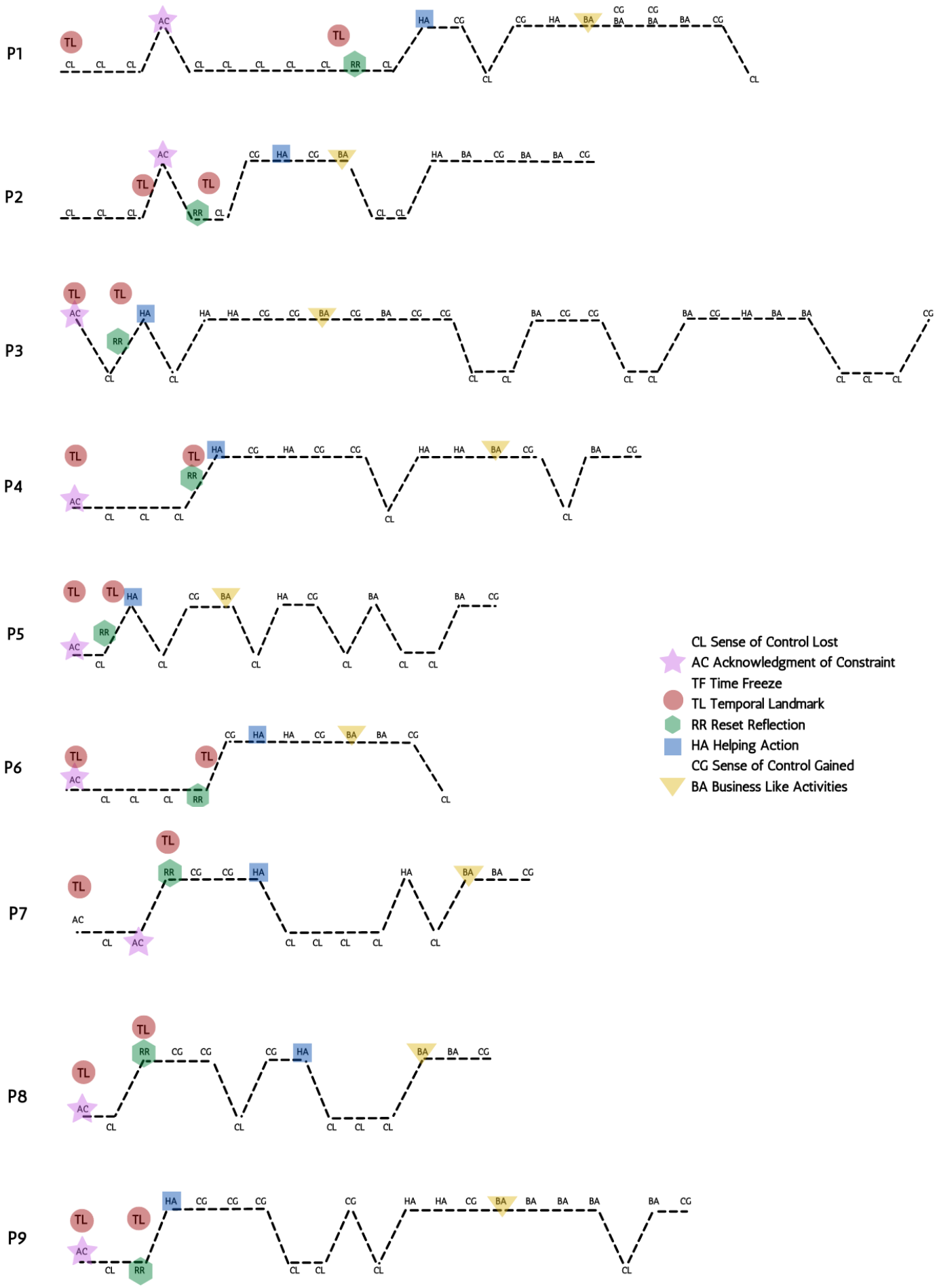



**Figure 3: Axial coding**


P1
P2
P3
P4
P5
P6
P7
P8
P9
CL Sense of Control Lost
AC Acknowledgment of Constraint
TF Time Freeze
TL Temporal Landmark
RR Reset Reflection
HA Helping Action
CG Sense of Control Gained
BA Business Like Activities

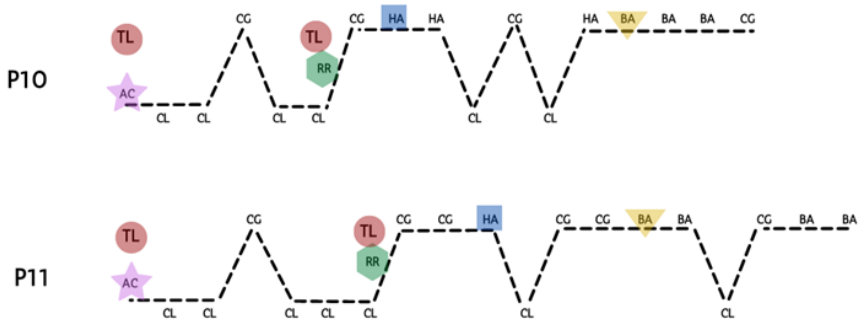



**Figure 4: Empirical regularities**

Our abductive analysis led us to identify a sequence of events that begins with an acknowledgement of constraint and leads to the expansion of 'opportunity-action spaces', where participants can expand their autonomy and take action. This resonates with notions in psychology and entrepreneurship research: temporal self-appraisal, resets (Dai, Milkman and Riis, 2014, 2015; Dai, 2018) and opportunity spaces (Jing and Benner, 2016; Dodd, Anderson and Jack, 2020). Temporal self-appraisal refers to the effect temporal landmarks (e.g New Year's Eve, the birth of a child, starting a new job) have upon people by producing mental accounting periods on either side of a landmark from which to reflect upon past performance (Peetz and Wilson, 2013; Dai, Milkman and Riis, 2014). They occur as distinct events which stand out against the everydayness of life and acquire personal meaning, "promoting a big-picture view of life" (Dai, Milkman and Riis, 2014, p.2564). These are experienced by our participants upon entering prison, and again after overcoming the initial traumatic settling-in period. Opportunity space refers to the perceived range of available options for organizational variance by embedded actors, which can provide possibilities for courses of change actions (Jing and Benner, 2016).

In a final ***Stage 5*** we leveraged these ideas to further abstract our findings and elaborate this EE process as the construction of autonomy under extreme constraints. Our presentation of the mechanism of autonomy construction introduces the notion of 'working constraints', which is marked by two distinct stages: exploring constraints and expanding constraints. We

summarize the latter in an abductively developed process model, which guides the presentation of our findings.

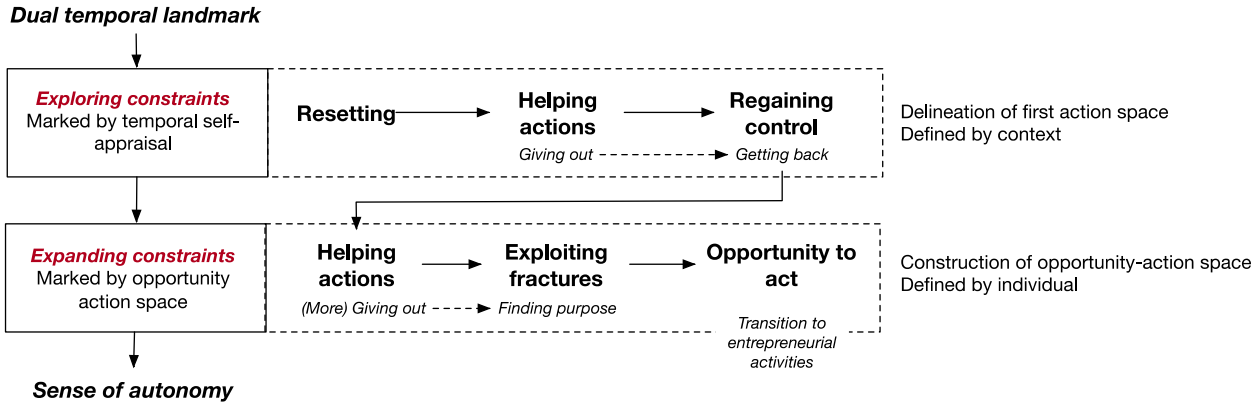



**Figure 5: Working constraints: Construction of autonomy under extreme constraints**

## 5 Findings

Wooldredge (2020) highlights how people respond to the challenges presented by the physical environment of prison confinement may include the generation of or joining in with subcultures in an effort to alleviate negative pressures. How these subcultures manifest is generally bracketed and shaped "by the means available in a prison environment (e.g., gang membership, underground economies, pseudo families, and intimate partners)" (p.167). While most inmates return to deviant behaviour as a form of maladaptation to the stress of prison (The Centre for Entrepreneurs, 2016; Wooldredge, 2020), our participants appear to experience something different. We discover a unique process constituting the construction of autonomy within restrictive contexts through actively 'working constraints'. This process antecedes entrepreneurial activities. During this early process, we observe that there is no initial direct intention to engage in entrepreneurship for venture creation, this comes much later, with a focus instead placed upon exploiting and expanding (working) the constraining prison context, which indirectly affords plasticity to the perception of constraint. This is a process enabled by the expansion of opportunity-action spaces, which precedes entrepreneurial actions and the realization of emancipatory outcomes. We elaborate on this process as the construction of

autonomy under extreme constraints. It is comprised of two stages, ‘exploring constraints’ and ‘expanding constraints’, with six constituent parts, and is preceded by all inmates with an acknowledgement of trauma.

### 5.1 Exploring constraints.

Exploring constraints begins with the identification of two ‘breaking from the past’ events, which, we argue, is marked by temporal self-appraisal. Here, the commencement of incarceration is experienced as a dual temporal landmark for all inmates, ending one experience of relative freedom and commencing a new, traumatic experience of constraint and restriction upon autonomy.

Entering prison can be considered as a distinct temporal landmark for our participants, a process which commences with being removed from society, family and home, to be placed into a unique context of constraint requiring the adherence to new punitive norms, values and expectations. Inmates thus endure a traumatic settling-in period, adjusting to their new environment. As the initial traumatic experience evolves into acceptance, a second temporal landmark occurs, marked by a perception of time having frozen, as life on the ‘outside’ carries on whilst it stops for them inside (Cope, 2003; Garner, 2020; Murray, 2020). In the following quotes, participants 2 and 3 reflect on how time stops once incarcerated:

> I suppose the hardest thing is your life becomes standstill and everyone else’s moves on so you feel no different. You're not clock-watching because each … you don’t in the end because you get yourself into a routine, but it's the same thing day in day out day in day out and time becomes anonymous. Whereas the whole world is moving on, on the outside. (P3)

> because what you do get in there was obviously, they say when you go to prison, you leave the same age you were when you went in, a lot of people say that, you know because you're not, you know, if you go in as a fucking, I don’t know, as a 19-year-old or 20 year old, who was, you know, thought he was a gangster but really he lived in his mums spare bedroom (P2)

Time freezing and settling-in thus constitute meaningful temporal landmarks. Given their salience they induce a perceived gap between current and possible future selves, in turn generating motivation to reduce this gap leading to more “goal-consistent choices” (Peetz and

Wilson, 2013, p.263), marking a ‘fresh start’.

Such accounts are supported by psychological research with depressive patients who describe time slowing down, as a ‘depressive time’ experience (Cavaletti and Heimann, 2020). Further research has discussed a phenomenon labelled as ‘temporal-binding’ whereby events recalled as being causally related are perceived as occurring much closer together than they may actually have been (Blakey et al., 2019), distorting time periods and sense-making processes. In prison calendar events become much less important as compared to release dates, weakening the impact of temporal binding, drawing out time. In the quotes below, participants reflect on how important personal dates are, particularly concerning those which represent release progression:

> And one of the main issues I had thinking back now, was because we were sort of switched on in terms of how prison works by this point, because again remember when I told you when we first landed I was focused on getting out and what you can do, so you ask any prisoner and they’re shit hot with their dates in terms of, everything works on dates it’s like waypoints so it’s similar to this graph when the sentence starts you think right ok, well I’ll be eligible for this at this date, I’ll be eligible for that at this date and these are your things, these are the waypoints that you’re waiting for. (P1)

> High, because from the minute that I got into jail that’s all that I was thinking about, getting Cat D [the date at which they would be transferred to a lower Category D prison] (P11)

> *So would you say that it’s a type of high point?* Yeah put it up there, because that’s the main thing that you’re aiming for, you’ve got to do all your behavioural, because you get a sentence plan so I’d try to do everything to make sure that I got it, like that’s all I was working for whilst I was in there (P11)

*Resetting.* With the perception of time changing for all inmates, our participants begin stage one of gaining autonomy, reflecting upon the opportunity to reset themselves and move away from the opportunity for deviant behaviour which many inmates feel pressure to engage in (Wooldredge, 2020). The decoupling of the past and current self has been argued to encourage the closing of ‘mental accounts’ associated with past events and the opening of new ‘mental accounts’ (Dai, Milkman and Riis, 2014) to cover expectations, hopes and plans for a new epoch moving forward. We recognize this post-settling-in event as a ‘reset’, which causes a break in perceptions of past behaviour. The materialization of resetting is observed in the

recognition of a new epoch and a dissonance developing between past and future self-expectations, as is highlighted with participant 5 and their experience below:

> Yeah, it was a rest and a reset, it was taking a step back, prison let me do that. I also got to do mundane and service activity which was sewing boxer shorts together you know, eat sleep rave repeat in prison, you know over and over, what a beautiful time it was, I say that with absolute, you know my partner is within earshot and she knows I wanted nothing more than to be back with people, but we also know that just having the time, for someone to set my routine for meals you know, you get all of that dealt with and what you are left with is self-actualization and that is what the point of prison is I believe (P5)

Self-evaluations of past behaviour impact upon belief in future abilities, as such experiencing a reset allows for the introduction of mental distance between possible negative performance or behaviour and its impact on future ability (Libby and Eibach, 2002). The longer the mental distance or the slower the pace this is perceived to extend for, the greater the dissociation between past and current self, and the greater the depth of reset. Participant 10 explains below how from experiencing an initial reset, over time they began to recognize a 'new normal' which was different to their past self:

> although when the door closed it was the unknown that was then replaced with the upset and anxiety, I know the shame and embarrassment that I put on the family it was all over the papers, it was on BBC News, still if you Google it today it's on there and it's the embarrassment you know…. Then I had regular visits, and things started, I kind of started settling into things, you get yourself a job, I was a wing cleaner at first and I worked on the Servery, I worked in the kitchens whilst I was in there, so when you get them little jobs you get privileges, more access to the gym so things are not so much normal, but it's the new normal (P10)

*Helping actions and regaining control*. After settling in, we observe that breaking away from deviant behaviour is reinforced by what we identify as 'helping actions', which are aimed at supporting others facing similar constraints. They do so as a way of (unintentionally) trying to fill the void of constraint via doing things and taking part in activities and tasks. Here, the types of event participants take part in matters. We observe a pattern of 'helping others' events across cases where participants, despite experiencing perceptions of restriction, have taken it upon themselves to help other inmates. Below, participant 4 describes the extra level of service they would provide on top on the role they undertook as a prison recruiter:

> [Regarding becoming a recruiter for prison jobs] I had like tea, coffee and stuff like that in there, sweets and all that, like err snacks and people used to come up and find out what, what jobs they wanted to do and stuff like that and I'd put them in the good jobs to be honest (P4)

Helping actions emerge as our participants separate themselves from the restrictive context as agents, becoming aware of the ability to enact change. This alters their perception of constraint thereby developing a sense of agency and of regaining control, which was lost after extreme constraints were imposed upon them. Helping actions modify the time set by the temporal landmarks. Helping others in a space of constraint is seen as beneficial as it is an inconspicuous activity which does not draw attention from the oppressive context, yet increases the chances of early release, helping to reconstruct the perception of time.

Although across cases we observe reports of being overwhelmed, all display the ability to move through this stage by helping others, and in doing so find a way to distinguish themselves *from the restrictive context*, regaining control of one's narrative, and making sense of the lived experience. This marks the delineation of an initial action space that bounds 'helping actions' and the exploring of constraint. Although retrospectively this could be viewed as an epiphanic process, we see no evidence from the participants of either experiencing a sudden realization of change potential or of being aware of commencing a new epoch in behaviour or intention. Rather this process unfolds incrementally and subtly, as the exploration of possibilities continues. As described by participants 3 and 7 below, regardless of the activity they undertook, they found themselves helping others and incrementally exploring further opportunities:

> So like becoming a listener … becoming a Shannon Trust Reader to help people, sort of help them read … I was involved in the education, ESOL [English to Speakers of Other Languages course] everything there. I become a gym mentor, although it doesn't look like it now…So I was getting involved in courses and I was getting myself involved in different committees as well and it gave you access … even being a listener you basically, you go on a rota and people call you up for all sorts of reasons, but it's not always suicide could be anything, you know, any kind of worries (P3)

> we were called a Peer Leader, but it was the best-paid job in the prison, you'd do 12 hours a day seven til seven, but you'd deal with people coming back from court as well and like you'd have to deal with them and like send them their dinner, it was... more of something, there was lots to do 'cos you could be a cleaner, you could work on the gardens, but this like, the prison officers had to trust you, 'cos like you had to deal with people who had drugs on them, obviously you wouldn't grass on them, but you'd just

like settle them in. A lot of them had been in and out of there anyway, but no, it was definitely, I enjoyed it to be honest (P7)

## 5.2 Expanding constraints

*Exploiting fractures whilst doing more helping actions.* To "do more for others" in a context where material restrictions are fixed, severe, and omnipresent, participants begin to expand the action space by exploring and exploiting the fractures and cracks of the prison environment, for example taking on peer mentoring duties, offering employability advice, or providing drug and alcohol support services. These actions alter how participants frame the prison context from one of more so restrictive, to becoming opportunistic despite the physical restriction of prison remaining unchanged, with some events so impactful they afford a realization of a much wider opportunity space. However, this is not a linear process with growth and retraction occurring in response to the dynamic constraining context, as displayed by participant 3 below who after several months of engaging in activities which helped to develop his perception of expansion, is temporarily sent to a new prison, causing his opportunity space to shrink and all activities to pause as he attempts to make sense of his context:

> I got stuck there, we got snowed in the first few days in with a cell with some young lad who seemed all right, and then we got split up to go somewhere else and I didn't realize he'd rifled through all my bags … stress, because he was just flipping out all the time. If you've never seen it you never want to see it. That is something on another level … he was eating his [breakfast] … it would drop on the floor like 12 hours before and [he would be] just scraping it up off the floor and eating it. And we had bunk beds and he said 'you take the bottom bunk'. So I said 'right' but he kept passing out on there because his brother-in-law and that were passing him the spice [drugs] through the door, he was going out fighting on the wings, breaking up the cell, and he blew the electrics as well. So we had no electricity for four days. That was a tough time. (P3)

Participant 3 goes on to continue displaying helping actions as soon as they are relocated and their perception of constraint loosens. As such they take an active role in their contextual experience across time, becoming a participant in the emergence of their sense of purpose.

*A sense of purpose.* As participants undertake helping activities, they begin to interpret these actions, the actions of others, and the actions of the constraining context whether

affording or removing opportunity, to effect change to their world view, to disrupt the disruption they experience when entering prison. With helping actions intensifying, a sense of purpose takes further shape where it appears that more can be done, including seeking out in-prison business networks, undertaking library research, training in app development, or pursuing external qualifications. This is highlighted in the quotes below:

> By then I had rocketed, literally rocketed because the mentor role had kicked in, I had a purpose and I moved to open prison which is a stepping stone towards home and I felt like I was in control of my life a little bit weirdly, I think it was like you know throughout my life I have always helped people, even if it was helping people get a job, I always helped my friends, help people that I know. It's just part of who I am and someone said it's because I get a kick out of it which is probably true but I've never consciously thought of that it's never been my reason behind it I just genuinely do it. But I think that is why I was probably about a sixty [salience score] then even though I was in prison I was probably even higher, seventy, I did feel quite happy. Positive that I was going to do something (P6)

> Yeah, there are probably a few. I became a mentor and I got trained to be a mentor and then started supporting people in prison and supporting the reasons why they were in and like the guy that killed [famous victim], I got called to his cell and I felt like I had a purpose, I was there to do a job and that is what fuelled me a little bit so that was a positive thing (P6)

A consequence of developing a sense of purpose from helping actions is the development of resilience in the face of adversity. Resilience can be described as both "an ability to go on with life, or to continue living a purposeful life, after hardship or adversity" (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004, p.4). Having a sense of purpose aids in the development of resilience, providing meaning and intention to behaviour, offering a future goal on the horizon to help pull towards during times of high stress and uncertainty. Through developing resilience and persisting with purpose, participants allow themselves to open up to new ideas and opportunities, as opposed to experiencing constraint as overwhelming and occluding opportunity.

*Opportunity to act.* As this process unfolds, we noticed that these two elements, purpose and helping actions, begin to operate in conjunction deepening the perception of control whilst enabling the construction of new opportunity-action spaces. Here, our participants begin to perceive a wider range of available options for them and their helping actions, which can in

turn provide possibilities for courses of change actions. As the perception of these spaces is expanded, individuals gain access to resources and knowledge may be acquired and exploited. Dodd, Anderson and Jack (2020) argue that this is a transformative liminal context in which a thing is in a process of change towards something else. Being aware of and undertaking scanning for perceived choices dictates the extent for action to be undertaken and whether the opportunity space can be exploited as an *opportunity-action space*. We noticed that it is through the nature of fluid and non-fixed boundaries, of recombining and reconfiguring, which allows for entrepreneuring within opportunity-action spaces. We see the exploitation of new resources and knowledge below with participant 4 who after orchestrating a new kitchen role found further opportunity to grow their space for action:

> [After being offered the role of managing the prison visitor kitchen] We started putting like, erm, scones with butter cream and jam, chocolate cake, carrot cake, err, we were making all, like, halal sandwiches, chicken sandwiches and they were getting freshly made every day and within a week of doing it we just transformed the whole prison and for me, I could see [it was] like a good way of helping people and families and just trying to work it from there…For me that was a big part of me changing, you know what I mean. (P4)

Interestingly, it is the perception of the opportunity-action space opening, rather than the actual physical space itself, which dictates the extent to which an agent feels there is more or less opportunity to pursue autonomy, enact authoring, and make declarations, in turn informing the degrees of freedom one can gain. Through authoring the entrepreneur "must necessarily attend to the variety of relationships, structures, norms, and rules within which an entrepreneurial project is undertaken" (Rindova et al,. p.483), in an attempt at gaining and maintaining control of ones lived experience. This is contingent upon the expansion of opportunity-action spaces.

*Transition to entrepreneurial activities.* The expansion of opportunities to act lays a fertile ground for the engagement with entrepreneurial activities, as 'helping actions', fuelled by purpose, transition to business-like initiatives. The form of entrepreneuring undertaken varies from participant to participant and depends upon previous history and experience, current context, or perception of future options, with some directly working towards a venture for

operation once released, whilst for others this takes the form of entrepreneuring towards another goal, such as gaining ROTL (Released on Temporary Licence), or developing prison literature, or a talent contest. Whatever the case, entrepreneurial actions become noticeable only after the opportunity-action space is expanded, marking the individuals as "being entrepreneurial" to the researchers. This order is described by participant 8 below who explains how they held on to a business idea for a while, but only acted when they felt the time was right:

> Yeah it give me that sort of, when you are talking about things you are talking them into being aren't you? So I was always talking about it as if I had already established it already. I have always been quite good at doing that. Almost reaffirming that it is happening, it's just like a case of how it is happening. But that was when it all started. The actual business model was formed at that point rather than the business idea [which] was starting to brew early doors, but the model was being formed then (P8)

Once the entrepreneurial idea has struck on timelines, although the perception of restriction remains dynamic with continued fluctuations, these changes of perception occur over relatively shorter timespans with a majority perceiving less restriction for longer periods as they continue to entrepreneur and experience a sense of emancipation.

## 6 A middle-range theory of the construction of autonomy under extreme constraints

From exploring the process individuals embark upon whilst enduring contexts of extreme constraint, we offer a unique theoretical contribution which unveils how the construction of autonomy precedes entrepreneurial action. We show this by describing how through a process of exploring constraints, at-risk groups are able to delineate an initial space where they can take action, a space which is usually defined by the oppressive context. From here at-risk groups are able to expand constraint to facilitate the construction of an *opportunity action space*, a space normally defined by the individual. The combined sequence of these two processes increases the sense of autonomy for those at-risk.

The process commences with the traumatic experience of being imprisoned marking the end of one time period of prior freedom. This experience represents an initial 'temporal landmark' in the lived experience. As the shock of imprisonment is acknowledged and

acceptance occurs, a second temporal landmark takes place stemming from a sense of 'life freezing', as life on the 'outside' carries on (Cope, 2003; Garner, 2020; Murray, 2020). This dual temporal landmark delineates the first action space, defined by context.

Experiencing life inside prison as a stalling of progression, of time freezing, produces a 'resetting' opportunity. This is an intention to make a clear break from the past and is not unique to this context - New Year's resolutions, birth of a child, milestone birthdays etc for different people can all represent the closing of one mental accountancy period and the opening of a new one. In this manner a temporal self-appraisal occurs as participants recount past selves from the prior context, and anticipate future selves within a new highly constrained context. In prison, a resetting must take place to counteract adhering to the dominant, deviant oppressive norms and values as a form of maladaptation to constraint, and as such occlude alternative forms of non-deviant empowering adaptation.

From this point, *exploration of constraint* can commence. A consequence of resetting and rejecting deviant norms, is a greater capacity for engaging in strategies which not only help to navigate a dynamically changing constraint on a day-to-day basis, but which can also positively impact upon length of imprisonment. One strategy which can achieve both is to engage in pro-social activities which do not raise awareness from the constraining context, yet can create a sense of *loosening* restriction and thus afford exploration of constraint. This is achieved through helping actions, *'giving out to others'* activities which can be as simple as helping to hang curtains for another inmate without expecting reciprocation. Such an activity is experienced as producing a greater sense of opportunity to *do more* within a constraining context. Subtly helping others neither induces more constraint, nor creates the perception of being a threat, but instead is innocuous enough to fly under the radar whilst crucially offering an experience of *control*.

Such positive outcomes within extremely constricting contexts encourage further pro-social activities, and over time repeated incidents of control are experienced – a sense of *getting*

*something back* from the constricting context. The ad-hoc nature of this process is important as it better deals with the dynamically constraining prison context, which pushes and pulls from various angles including changing regulations, violence, bullying, drug taking peers, corrupt prison officers, extended sentences and more. By undertaking activities which do not follow a set pathway or programme, exploration can continue, flexibility is afforded, opportunities for helping others can be capitalized upon or passed up to better navigate restriction.

The second stage of *expanding* constraints comes with greater awareness for opportunity to engage more intentionally in helping actions. Awareness grows as to whether the actions undertaken increase or decrease the opportunity to effect change to their world view of constraint, and as evidence builds regarding supporting actions being undertaken without immediate repercussion i.e. getting away with it, perception of the action space can change into an *opportunity-action space*. Notably, physical constraint is rarely impacted by the actions undertaken, rather a shift occurs at an epistemological level, internal to the restricted individual. As such context and its restrictions are experienced as an internal construct, with a sense of control and autonomy developed from within, as opposed to achieving control over the restrictive environment. This is a stage defined by the individual rather than the context, further it is from experiencing this deeper epistemological shift that a sense of purpose can find room to grow. An idea lying dormant or previously dismissed, now has the fertile ground to slowly and subtly take hold, and in doing so sets a waypoint to aim for, an *opportunity to act* is recognised whilst finding meaning and purpose in the actions undertaken.

The perceived opportunity-action space is expanded sufficiently for the seeds of entrepreneuring to begin to unfold, affording a sense of control to the extent that opportunities can now be *exploited.* Library research is undertaken, qualifications pursued, informal advice and guidance sought, risks taken within formal roles - we see the exploitation of new resources and knowledge. This mindset shift occurs only after the perceived opportunity-action space has been sufficiently expanded to accommodate the possibilities of entrepreneuring. A

consequence of this is the increase in frequency of perceptions for opportunity where previously there was little to none, along with an increase in resilience and purpose.

Sequentially combined, exploring and then expanding constraint develops a sense of autonomy previously removed. Importantly our middle-range theory of autonomy construction under extreme constraints argues for a shift in the perception of context, from something objectively lived through, to something internally experienced. Viewed in this manner the process of exploring and expanding constraint represents an epistemological shift for those at-risk attempting to overcome restriction, with control over the restrictive context and the 'self' achieved not through the 'self' conquering or outmaneuvering the restrictive context (as is often discussed within EE literature), but through experiencing a combination of the *self with context.* It is from reaching this sense of control of the lived experience that a sense of autonomy along with entrepreneuring can commence.

## 7 Discussion

Although emancipatory process research is growing, very little is known about the processes leading to emancipation and the interaction between individuals and the restrictive context. This, we argue, is problematic in several ways. Literature over-emphasizes agency neglecting constraints and thus the dynamic relationship between the individual and the constraining context. Second, it assumes that emancipation and entrepreneuring work in conjunction as individuals seek to overcome constraints, overlooking what enables emancipatory processes. Finally, it neglects the origins of autonomy, as an essential pre-condition for emancipation. In some contexts, autonomy seems impossible to achieve, yet emancipation occurs nonetheless. This raises questions as to how autonomy is constructed under extreme constraints. This is our point of departure.

Our research uncovers how from an initial traumatic, freedom-stripping experience, which constitutes a temporal landmark, all individuals endure a settling-in period often resulting in the pursual of deviance as an adaptive strategy to align with expected prison norms and values.

Our participants however are unveiled to choose a different pathway, and instead experience a resetting period commencing a process of exploring the constraining context, as opposed to being overwhelmed by it. Our eleven participants actively work constraints through exploring and then exploiting the gaps for an opportunity, in comparison to those who return to deviant behaviour where constraints seem to prevail. Through a series of helping actions where they give out support to others, they begin to take in a sense of control. Here, actively doing something opens the perceptual space over time, eventually setting the scene for the entrepreneurial idea to strike and take hold, thus commencing entrepreneuring. This is aligned with Heilbrunn (2019) in their study of asylum seekers held at containment camps in Israel depicting institutional voids. By doing something, asylum seekers were able to express the self. The relative success of undertaking such activities fuels the widening of the perceptual opportunity space, positioning the individual to better mentally adapt to a dynamically restrictive context.

Gradually an expansion of constraint is observed, with fractures in the constraining context exploited, and a sense of purpose evolving as a transition towards business-like activities is undertaken, moving from an experience defined by the context, towards being defined by the individual. Exploring the fractures and gaps of constraint grows the space for opportunity into an opportunity-action space, with the opportunity to act creating the fertile ground for entrepreneuring, and autonomy to grow. Indeed, we thus observe that the emancipatory process begins earlier than entrepreneurship. In this sense, it appears that the beginning of autonomy is more complex than originally thought and authoring and the ability to make self-declarations through entrepreneurship seem possible only after a sequence of circumstances leads to the expansion of opportunity-action spaces.

## 8 Theoretical contributions

This study makes three contributions. First, we extend emancipatory entrepreneurship theory by revealing and theorizing the process of construction of autonomy as an early enabler of

emancipation. Our findings show that entrepreneurship and emancipation do not necessarily work in conjunction and that seeking autonomy can initiate in extremely restrictive contexts by working the context and expanding the opportunity-action space before entrepreneurial actions can materialize. We argue that by doing so, would-be entrepreneurs develop a dynamic relationship with constraints, helping them to progress from a perception of restriction to one of opportunity. From here, we challenge the assumed position that perceptual opportunity spaces are constrained by the fixed restrictive context, through the discovery of dynamic constraint we show that this is not always the case.

Relatedly, we extend our theoretical knowledge of how people construct opportunity spaces finding congruence with Dodd, Anderson and Jack (2020) who suggest that entrepreneuring takes place across liminal spaces, where a thing is in a process of becoming another, and acts as a process which creates change through connecting. We see evidence within this study for the nature of fluid and non-fixed boundaries, of recombining and reconfiguring to allow for entrepreneuring. What we find however is that the opportunity action space *is what emerges between* the constraining dynamics of prison and the EE process, constructed and maintained by the individual.

We also contribute to a broader understanding of emancipation in disadvantaged settings, where overcoming constraints tend to be conceptualized at the level of resources. Our research brings to light the role of action spaces. We reveal that the construction of spaces – material and perceived - where people can act, are as relevant as the entrepreneurial actions generally prescribed to deal with resource constraints. Our findings also have significant practical implications for the rehabilitation of offenders, providing evidence for 'goal orientated' models of rehabilitation such as the Good Life Model (Fortune, 2018) which promotes life goal aspirations as a device for avoiding reoffending. Through these results we see clear evidence of how entrepreneuring fosters a strong sense of purpose beyond the prison context, aiding in reducing reoffending.

Finally, we provide an empirical cross-case understanding of autonomy construction in EE. EE has received limited research and of those studies published we often find a focus on single case studies and the application of a feminist / patriarchal lens (Al-Dajani et al., 2015; Sopranzetti, 2017; Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018; Martinez Dy, Martin and Marlow, 2018; St-Arnaud and Giguère, 2018; McAdam, Crowley and Harrison, 2020; Ojediran and Anderson, 2020). This has led to what Williams et al., (2020) refer to as reductive approaches which, although valid in their own contexts, fail to provide analysis across multi-levels, often centered upon "what is local, immediate or measurable, resulting in 'thin' descriptions and weak explanations" (p.6).

## 9 Advancing research on restorative entrepreneuring

Developing theory for the construction of autonomy advances our understanding of restorative entrepreneuring, as from this perspective, it is through engaging with pro-social interpersonal networks via entrepreneuring, that the at-risk individual can commence a process of enhancing their sense of autonomy. Critically autonomy here is not constructed in an individualistic sense, with seeking independence from 'surrounding others' through self-reliance and self-sufficiency (Anderson and Honneth, 2005), and implying the removal of any constraint which could impede upon one's own 'pursuit of happiness'. Rather this research reveals the importance of helping actions, of engaging with the surrounding others to achieve recognition and acknowledgement for these actions as part of an ongoing interpersonal process.

This study reveals the individual's sense of autonomy emerging from encounters with others and the other's perspectives towards themselves (Anderson and Honneth, 2005). As helping actions are undertaken individuals receive self-affirming feedback from their peers, and although helping actions are not undertaken altruistically, individuals do receive affirmation that what they have done is positive, is pro-social, and is non-deviant. This form of validation helps to not only reconstruct self-respect, self-trust and self-esteem, but the pro-social nature of such inter-personal validation aids in *positively rehumanising* the individual.

Prior to commencing helping actions and expanding the opportunity space to do more, the imprisoned individual attempts to make sense of their situation. All contextual information confirms what they suspect of themselves, of being wrong, of being othered and of being 'doomed to deviance' (Maruna, 2001). This research shows however that despite existing within a highly restrictive context, through undertaking helping actions and giving out to the wider context, an epistemological shift in comprehending constraint can occur, making it possible for a restrictive context to give back, and to do so in such a manner as to validate a sense of autonomy were the individual views themselves as *different from* the restrictive deviant context.

## 10 Practical implications

This paper provides significant practical value in revealing a potentially important new approach to offender rehabilitation through entrepreneuring. Prominent in rehabilitation research and practice is the Good Life Model which promotes undertaking activities which pull the participant towards life goals (primary goods) (Fortune, 2018). This perspective has been criticized however as potentially being insufficient to tackle a mindset change from antisocial to prosocial (Wainwright and Muñoz, 2020), especially in respect of the complexity of the prison climate where research has highlighted a perception amongst many prisoners of staff displaying limited interest in rehabilitation (Bullock and Bunce, 2020). This paper however reveals the merits of developing entrepreneurial assets in prison, including social capital, network building, undertaking research, mitigated risk-taking and the opportunity to practice pro-social roles, all opportunities which are rare within prison (McNeill et al., 2012; Bullock and Bunce, 2020). In general, this paper brings to light the merits of constructing autonomy, within emancipatory entrepreneuring, as a new concept for rehabilitation practice which can aid in reducing reoffending.

## 11 Limitations and future research

The findings of this study open several future avenues for further research. The depth and richness of the data presented provides a detailed examination of how autonomy can be constructed under the highly restrictive contexts of imprisonment. However the small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. More research into challenging contexts involving a larger number of marginalised individuals from various challenging contexts could further develop the impact opportunity-action spaces, helping actions and purpose have upon restricted individuals attempting to emancipate. This raises the question as to whether varying challenging contexts (tyranny, slavery etc) which remove autonomy require alternative strategies and actions to reconstruct autonomy, and if so what type of process would this be?

Secondly participants in this study all recounted their emancipatory experiences as commencing from a much earlier point in time before they began to show entrepreneurial behaviour. However we know that in-prison entrepreneurship training programmes are already employed as tool to help reduce recidivism and promote a positive lifestyle change (Sonfield, 2013; The Centre for Entrepreneurs, 2016). As such further longitudinal research exploring the process, influence and impact formal ‘in prison’ entrepreneurship training programmes have upon emancipatory outcomes and in particular the development of autonomy across the process, presents a new opportunity for theoretical development.

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## Chapter Four - Entrepreneuring, Emancipation and Pathways to Agency: A Study of Entrepreneurial Experiences After Prison


### Abstract

Entrepreneurs are viewed as particularly well positioned to achieve emancipation from oppressive societal norms such as stigmatisation, with their everyday practices containing subtle acts of resistance against adversity. In such restricted contexts where rules are dictated and agentic spaces designated, the oppressed must enact authoring, taking control and ownership of their actions. How this process unfolds however for those oppressed is largely unknown, and yet entrepreneuring is used as a rehabilitative process for marginalised groups. To explore this problem, we focus upon eleven ex-offenders who undertook entrepreneuring after release from prison in attempt to regain their status and independence. By employing life-story research, a narrative framework was developed for each participant, followed by process-tracing data analysis divided into four iterative stages. Findings reveal a unique authoring process comprised of a common starting point which diverges along two pathways where individuals either overcome or accommodate constraint via entrepreneuring, reaching a common end point of gaining agency over constraint. This research contributes at a theoretical level to the emancipation framework by providing new conceptual linkages within the authoring dimensions of emancipation, expanding emancipatory entrepreneuring theory. This study highlights the importance of recognising and capitalising upon narratives accepted by society to allow for empowering and validating the self in the eyes of the community.



*Keywords: Emancipation; entrepreneuring; stigmatisation; marginalization; authoring pathways*

## 1 Introduction

At-risk social groups are those members of a community who are vulnerable to marginalization from the norms, values and beliefs of the society they exist within (Webb et al., 2009). Watson and Cuervo (2017) argue at-risk groups are designated as such due to the norms imposed by certain groups who hold power within society, deciding who should be accepted within a 'normative realm', and who should not. As such being at-risk is less about an individual attribution and more so about what society deems as valid or invalid as a reflection of social values.

To be deemed as incongruent to social values is to risk attracting stigma, prejudice and discrimination from society, which combined can be experienced as a rejection of an individual's personhood. Stigmatisation acts as a normalizing process for society, as through defining deviance and unacceptable behaviour, societal members can maintain predictability and order (Gans, 1995), providing comfort through an oppositional mindset when identifying the 'other' (Smith, 2010). Mechanic and Tanner (2007) argue that such public behaviour manifests not only 'others' but within them 'sinners and victims'. Sinners are those deemed both at-risk and as personally responsible for their circumstances, e.g. substance abusers or ex-offenders, and as such are entitled to less public compassion and indeed should be othered and pushed towards the edges of society. A consequence of this behaviour is to experience what are already fragile social networks which offer emotional and practical support, becoming precarious, reducing the number of surrounding others who can provide validation of self-worth (Mechanic and Tanner, 1997), in turn deepening the level of disempowerment felt to enact change.

One strategy to overcome marginalisation is to increase an individual's network of positively validating 'surrounding others' and to engage in rehabilitative processes with pro-social organisations. In doing so, those at-risk are supported to affect a positive life change through a transition from oppression towards empowerment or emancipation.

However for some who have already overcome constraint, the intersectionality of systems of oppression which bring together multiple exclusionary social categories can mean that stigmatisation persists (Lassalle and Shaw, 2021). This process is examined by Adeeko and Treanor (2022) when discussing the lived experience of refugee women. They describe how despite benefitting from a privileged social class in their home country, once refugee status is sought in order to overcome oppression, the individual will likely experience a subsequent shift downwards as their social class "intersects with an assigned refugee status and racial identity upon her arrival in the host country" (p.28), invoking a stigmatised generic identity.

Emancipatory entrepreneuring (EE) has been welcomed by policymakers and within literature as a route towards positive societal change for those at-risk. Entrepreneurs are viewed as particularly well positioned to achieve emancipation from oppressive norms such as stigma, as their everyday practices contain subtle acts of resistance against adversity (Sabella and El-Far, 2019) facilitating the construction of "new 'spaces' for living, thinking and interacting" (Montessori, 2016, p.538). Key to expanding our knowledge regarding the process of EE and its variety of outcomes, is the development of understanding regarding the strategies and actions undertaken in relation to restrictive norms when attempting to emancipate. This is the process of authoring through entrepreneuring, a means to define new social arrangements and rules of engagement via reorganizing the context of existing structures and through taking ownership of oneself (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009). Authoring therefore is a process of becoming, and from the actors perspective requires taking ownership of one's own narrative in response to the rules and expectations of the societal structure, and as such could involve appropriating ready-made narratives, behaviours and discourses to competently partake in the social system (Gherardi, 2015).

To date, the process of EE however assumes emancipation takes place upon the static staging of constraint, assumes the removal of such constraint as part of a progressively linear process, assumes apriori positive outcomes, and also assumes that entrepreneuring and

emancipation work together. As such, EE literature overlooks what enables emancipatory processes, meaning we know little about the dynamic authoring strategies employed against dynamic contexts of constraint, and the constituent parts. This is an important omission considering we know EE is undertaken within contexts of constraint and is utilized as a viable form of reintegration and rehabilitation for those marginalised (Andrews, Bonta and Wormith, 2011; Centre for Entrepreneurs, 2016; Fajardo, Shultz and Joya, 2019). We wonder how this process unfolds for those attempting to tackle stigma and (re)gain agency over their lived experience within a dynamically disempowering context.

To address this issue, this paper sets out to explore the authoring strategies employed by those who have experienced both the removal and then granting of autonomy by being released from prison into a disempowering social structure, where constraint continues to dynamically exert itself through stigmatisation and stereotyping, requiring authoring to be undertaken differently to affect a positive life change.

We focus upon eleven ex-offenders who have undertaken entrepreneuring upon release in attempt to regain their status and independence. Life-story interviews were conducted across six months, capturing the key events of this process shortly after being released from prison. The average sentencing time for our sample is 5.3 years, the average time between release from prison and interview was 4.9 years, with most types of offence in relation to drug dealing and assault. We coded and analysed key events using process-tracing methods (Muñoz, Cacciotti and Cohen, 2018; Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte, 2019) to discover a unique authoring process comprised of two pathways, undertaken in response to a dynamically disempowering societal context which induces a hyper-vigilance towards autonomy re-loss. We discovered that upon release individuals re-enter into an overwhelming disempowering social arrangement, experiencing stigmatisation and a consistent fear of autonomy loss, placing them into a stage of 'passive autonomy' - a surprising finding considering all of our participants became known for being entrepreneurial in prison, and for some actively began venture development whilst in

prison. Once triggered into action, pathway one reveals an authoring strategy enacted to exploit stable yet stigmatising social and economic relationships, attempting to resolve the risk of re-losing autonomy through the manifestation and overcoming of constraint, producing opportunities to experience earned autonomy through entrepreneuring. By contrast pathway two sees a different form of authoring strategy, one much safer, which recognises the power of accommodating externally produced constraints to gain access to an established structure of power.

This study advances research on the emancipatory entrepreneuring perspective in the following ways. First, we contribute at a theoretical level to the emancipation framework by providing new conceptual linkages within the authoring dimensions of emancipation. Our findings reveal a split and dynamic view of authoring, against the straightforward and fixed portrayal of the phenomenon. Secondly, we highlight how the initial drivers of entrepreneurs are not always led by economic motivation and reveal a nuanced series of pathways embarked upon from a desire to create real change at the individual level via either overcoming or accommodating constraint. Finally, we show that entrepreneurship and emancipation do not necessarily work in conjunction, challenging the assumed linear, positive pathway entrepreneurs are thought to undertake.

## 2 Background literature

### 2.1 Stigma in at-risk groups

As described by Goffman (1963) stigma is a deeply discrediting attribute imposed upon an individual or group by society, which finds its power through the stigmatised person's interactions with others (Ricciardelli and Mooney, 2018). Although stigma is a process which develops over time (Singh, Corner and Pavlovich, 2015), once acknowledged stigma can "interrupt social and personal relationships and reshape each through the lens imposed by the stigma theory" (Sheppard and Ricciardelli, 2020. p.37). Through stigmatisation an individual moves from being "a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963,

p.3). Link and Phelan (2001) also note that stigma involves a label and stereotype, "with the label linking a person to a set of undesirable characteristics that form the stereotype" (p.368). Within a disempowering social arrangement marginalised individuals are forced to contend with stigma, attempting to take action in navigating government policies, social interactions, cultural norms and industry practices which operate to maintain power and uphold discriminatory norms (Adeeko and Treanor, 2022). Literature has produced a variety of research outputs regarding the benefits of EE for marginalised communities (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Dyer et al., 2016; Sabella and El-Far, 2019), questioning the meritocratic assumption of entrepreneurship (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Högberg et al., 2016) and its ability to overcome stigmatisation through access to resources, business support and poverty alleviation. Ruebottom and Toubiana (2020) explored entrepreneurs who operated within highly stigmatised industries, specifically the sex industry, investigating how individuals navigated discrimination, authoring a new space through their actions. They found a process of individuals actualising stigma-based opportunities to loosen stigmatising constraints, and in doing so created "important opportunities to satisfy unmet demand, establish ethical standards, and redefine oneself" (p.1060) outside of social norms. Sex workers identified the hypocrisy of a society which stigmatised their occupation yet still provided customers, and with this identification took exploitative action. Here we see the generation of a new space within a social structure where new identities can be established based upon different criteria, using entrepreneuring to break free from stigmatising social norms.

For other at-risk groups, Halushka (2016) argues that individuals who are released from prison receive a 'mark' of a criminal record, functioning as a 'negative credential' excluding access to employment and reproducing "inequality above and beyond any individual-level factors that might otherwise explain these outcomes" (p.74). Ricciardelli and Mooney (2018) discuss how when re-entering society, ex-offenders enter a disempowering social system where stigma lies latent, awaiting activation. It is through relationships with others and the discovery of prior imprisonment that the ex-offender becomes 'discredited'.

The lasting impact of stigmatisation experienced by ex-offenders not only negatively impacts upon employment opportunities (Sheppard and Ricciardelli, 2020), but through marginalisation results in poor mental health (Schnittker and John, 2007) and difficulty in securing housing (Travis, 2005), disempowering the individual. Research has discussed how the process of marginalisation can be so extreme as to result in some at-risk individuals self-actualizing their label and re-identifying with their stigmatized subculture (e.g. homelessness, serial offending) (Gerrard, 2015; Keene et al., 2018).

In search of acceptance, some individuals distance themselves from society through self-actualizing their label and by creating an opposition mindset, displaying an 'established lifestyle' (e.g. of reoffending) and of not wanting to experience 'failure' while attempting to move forward (e.g. rehousing support). This is a detrimental authoring strategy, reproducing the detrimental circumstances through the actions undertaken in response to societal marginalization and stigma. Within the entrepreneurship literature, authoring via emancipatory entrepreneuring has been explored as a pro-social strategy for overcoming such constraint.

### 2.2 Stigmatization and emancipatory entrepreneuring

Emancipatory entrepreneuring has been discussed by Rindova, Barry and Ketchen (2009) "as efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or group" (p.477). Entrepreneurs are particularly well positioned to achieve emancipation from authority, with their everyday practices containing subtle acts of resistance against adversity (Sabella and El-Far, 2019) facilitating the construction of "new 'spaces' for living, thinking and interacting" (Montessori, 2016, p.538), which in turn help to improve one's lived reality (Tobias, Mair and Barbosa-Leiker, 2013) and gain legitimacy within one's community (Mair, Marti and Ventresca, 2012).

To achieve emancipation through entrepreneuring, Rindova, Barry and Ketchen (2009) explain those restricted must transition through three stages. Firstly from existing within a context where agency has been removed, the group or individual must gain autonomy, breaking

free from perceived constraints. Secondly, in a restricted context where the rules are dictated and agentic spaces designated, the oppressed must enact authoring, taking control and ownership of their actions. Finally, the individual or group must be able to make declarations, stating their intentions to enact change towards the context and status quo, generating new spaces in the process.

Research has begun to show how the generation of new spaces as a result of EE can take place within continually stigmatising oppressive structures, even benefitting from them. Exploring the experiences of Palestinian women street vendors in the occupied Old City of Jerusalem, Sabella and El-Far (2019) observe how the women endured their indigenous entrepreneurship being stigmatised as 'illegal', 'informal' and as mere 'sustenance activities'.

In response women adapted to stigma, by internalising constraints, learning the rhythms and routines of their occupiers and exploited the cracks in government surveillance to capitalise upon opportunities and out-maneuverer local police. Here we see what Ruebottom and Toubiana (2020) refer to with the process of EE *loosening constraints* within stigmatising social structures, as opposed to producing an outright freedom from authoritarian structures, generating a greater opportunity to 'entrepreneur' with actions, which can be considered as a form of impact protection from authority.

Estrada (2016) finds a similar double edge sword to entrepreneuring for stigmatised communities, in that it both exposes the group to stigma and offers a route through it at the same time. Studying Mexican-origin street vendors in America and specifically the experiences of the vendor's children as second-generation immigrants, they find a form of attributional stigma as a consequence of the parent's entrepreneurship. Children "are automatically stereotyped as illegal immigrants and frequently told to go back to Mexico" (p.1665) as their parents engaged in an occupation considered as 'too Mexican'. Interestingly those children who worked with their parents and performed entrepreneurship, despite suffering stigma, developed what Estrada (2016) refers to as 'economic empathy' - "a

resiliency that results from experiencing their parent's position of oppression" (p.1666), as opposed to non-working children who struggle with stigma and express this through embarrassment of their parents and disinterest in their struggles. Here we see how the exposure to society entrepreneurship sometimes entails, can act as both an economic empowerment process, and as an aggravator of stigma, placing the entrepreneur and their family within the public realm of judgement against socially acceptable norms.

Since its introduction to the literature however, EE has seen limited exploration and development (Chandra, 2017; Wainwright and Muñoz, 2020; Zayadin, Zucchella and Anand, 2022), particularly towards its constituent elements and how these address stigmatisation and marginalisation. Additionally as highlighted by Goss et al., (2011), within the description of emancipatory entrepreneuring lies the implicit assumption of static rather than dynamic constraint. Here constraint is implied as a barrier to be overcome, rather than as a dynamic process to be engaged with. As emphasized by Laclau (2016), although it is true that restrictive contexts must precede emancipation - as without oppression the need for emancipation does not exist (Sharma, 2022), a static assumption of the relationship not only limits exploration of the strategies used to constrain, but also the variety of counter EE processes and possible outcomes (Calas, Smircich and Bourne, 2009).

Castellanza (2022) develops this observation further from an organisational perspective, suggesting "the emancipatory potential of entrepreneurship seems to differ across contexts, depending on the fit between the chosen organisational forms and the severity and types of poverty constraints" (p.14), and that organisational forms "emerge from the evolving interdependencies between entrepreneurs and their contexts, mediating the influence of societal structures, traditions, and expectations on individual behaviour" (p.14). Further Högberg et al., (2016) find for immigrants in Sweden who become entrepreneurs, the process of doing so can act as a rebuttal to stigmatisation, and yet "while they may claim entrepreneurial identities, the negative connotations of their refugee backgrounds persist in constraining the accrual of

capital and access to markets" (p.24).

Key therefore to expanding our knowledge of the process of EE and its variety of outcomes, is the development of a greater understanding regarding the strategies and actions undertaken in relation to context when attempting to emancipate. This is the process of authoring through entrepreneuring, a means to define new social arrangements and rules of engagement via reorganizing the context of existing structures and through taking ownership of oneself. Actors must author new relations (Haugh and Talwar, 2016), and move from a position of being exploited, to one of creating rules and taking action (Chandra, 2017), enabling the change potential of an entrepreneurial project (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009).

### 2.3 Overcoming stigma through authoring

The process of authoring concerns a (re)organizing of resource exchange in the context of existing structures, rather than a rejection of existing social arrangements. As such, this is not necessarily a process of attempting to revolutionise a restricted space and overthrow authority, but is more so a process of creating and then working within a space to mobilise resources from strongholds of power, accommodating constraint, and forging new relationships and arrangements via micro-processes to effect change (Haugh and Talwar, 2016).

Authoring is therefore a process of becoming and, from the actors' perspective, requires taking ownership of one's own narrative in response to the rules and expectations of the disempowering societal structure. As such, it could involve appropriating ready-made narratives, behaviours and discourses to competently partake in the social system (Gherardi, 2015).

Al-Dajani et al., (2015) discovered authoring strategies which capitalised upon ready-made detrimental narratives, undertaken by displaced Palestinian women operating handicraft businesses under conditions of constraint imposed by the Jordanian government. Although displaced people can live legally in Jordan, they are denied full citizenship rights including employment. Here, the authoring strategy enacted came from necessity and was undertaken in

a manner which displayed knowing conformity to the detrimental stigmatised narratives associated with "images of poor, displaced women, subjugated and dominated within a traditionally patriarchal culture" (p.4). Despite these narratives and restrictions, the women displayed defiance in their actions, "navigating and negotiating pathways to challenge and dispute the confines of contractual relationships" (p.727), creating networks of collaboration to work around intermediary SMEs and the government, finding empowerment in 'getting by' as opposed to directly challenging authority. Pergelova, Angulo-Ruiz and Dana (2021) explore the concept of authoring through taking ownership of one's own narrative and the differences in practice between entrepreneurs motivated to seek personal freedom, to those seeking societal change. They observed that those seeking socially collective freedom were more likely to experience conflict with "values of individual freedom and flexibility" (p.19) leading to "self-imposed constrains for the individual" (p.19) as they attempted to navigate the rules and norms on behalf of a collective. Sellerberg and Leppänen (2012) show a process of authoring as individuals experiencing failure and its associated stigma attempt to control their narrative across several stages of failure awareness, resulting in an 'epiphany' where views on stigma are revised into redemptive stories and actions taken to break the stereotype of failure and loosen the stigmatising constraints. As such the reorganising of expectations of failure in the context of existing structures, rather than a rejection of existing social narratives as to how failure is defined, help to redefine the narrative as the actor sees fit, gaining empowerment.

We see with these examples how the competent and successful participation within a disempowering social system depends upon the actor's ability to navigate amongst the systems expected rules and normative values in such a way as to best serve their own interests. The rules of a society, however, also attribute roles, "shared expectations as to how individuals should behave, and status, a social ranking granting legitimacy to operate in a certain context" (Castellanza, 2022, p.3). Combined together, rules, roles and status and how one adheres to each - or is perceived to, can enable or constrain entrepreneuring, influencing access to resources and networks impacting empowerment. As such when an actor finds themselves in a

context where the rules appear against them and they perceive the prescription of a detrimental role and their status to be removed, they can be considered as existing within a disempowering and stigmatising social arrangement.

To greater or lesser extents therefore, the role of the disempowering context shapes the strategy of authoring undertaken by the agent in attempt to regain empowerment. For marginalised groups such as ex-offenders who have been 'othered' by society, the authoring strategy employed is of critical importance.

As seen above, entrepreneurial emancipation and the process of authoring can produce pathways to mitigate, outmaneuver, or reorganise detrimental, stigmatising social systems. However, literature assumes that emancipation and entrepreneuring work in conjunction as individuals seek to overcome constraints, overlooking what enables emancipatory processes. It assumes free agency within meritocratic, accessible free markets, whereas it may instead recreate the conditions of restriction from which emancipation is sought (Datta and Gailey, 2012; Scott et al., 2012; Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Verduijn et al., 2014; Högberg et al., 2016; Ahl and Marlow, 2021).

Additionally, constraint is often portrayed as static, limiting our understanding of how motivation to overcome constraint is understood and enacted through actions and pathways. With this considered, we wanted to explore the processes undertaken by individuals who were authoring their lived experience to progress out of restrictive circumstances. We know that entrepreneurship is prescribed as a viable form of reintegration into society for ex-offenders (Centre for Entrepreneurs, 2016; Fajardo, Shultz and Joya, 2019) and data exists to support the apparent positive impact of stable occupation upon recidivism (Davis, Bahr and Ward, 2013; Steve Kirkwood and McNeill, 2015). We wonder however how this process unfolds for those granted freedom and who are attempting to gain agency over their lived experience within a dynamically stigmatizing and disempowering context.

## 3 Methods

Addressing the 'societal grand challenge' of stigmatization, marginalisation and its derivatives (e.g. poverty, poor health, inequality) requires creative approaches which acknowledge the messy, complex and evolving mix of social elements (Eisenhardt, Graebner and Sonenshein, 2016). As limited research exists regarding the authoring process for those recently granted freedom, an inductive approach was adopted, which is particularly appropriate for contexts in which there is limited yet existing theory, presenting the opportunity for modifying theory from data (Eisenhardt, Graebner and Sonenshein, 2016).

Upon reviewing authoring, Haugh and Talwar (2016) state that "to understand how actors author new relations, we need empirical data about the strategies that they pursue in designing new arrangements to support change" (p.645). Inspired by this, we wanted to delve into how the actions of ex-offenders interact with dynamic constraint in order to overcome stigma, suggesting an interpretivist stance, contending that the behaviour actors display is a result of their subjective perception of the context (Heilbrunn, 2019). Taking a multiple case study approach each case could be understood in its singular form, allowing for cross case comparison, identification of regularities and theory building.

### 3.1 Life-story research

This study focuses upon the period of time along which the process of authoring develops, after a sense of autonomy has been developed and before the individuals engage in broader processes of change. Life story research (Leung, 2010; Kevill et al., 2015) is particularly suitable here. As described by Atkinson (2006): "the life-story interview provides a practical and holistic methodological approach for the sensitive collection of personal narratives that reveal how a specific human life is constructed and reconstructed in representing that life as a story… The life-story approach offers a way, perhaps more than any other for another to step inside the personal world of the storyteller and discover larger worlds" (p.224).

Following Kevill et al., (2015), rather than gathering data across the whole life course,

focus was placed upon narrative ‘chapters’ and by asking participants to identify the key high and low events from the time of release from prison, to the date of the interview. Life story interviews hold many benefits for collecting such process driven data. Firstly, this approach encourages the participant to describe the process of authoring autobiographically, in their own words, enabling access to a richer understanding of the ex-offender experience, and in turn a deeper understanding of the saliency of key events and their relationship to each other which occurred during this time.

Life stories help participants to create unity in multiple identities (McAdams, 2001), especially important when considering the process of change ex-offenders who become entrepreneurs will undertake through authoring. Life stories also facilitate the ordering of key events, or chapters, capable of being sketched out non-chronologically initially, and then revised with accuracy as dormant memories are triggered adding specificity. This is a process of emplotment, “by which people imaginatively engage in the process of making sense of a story and determine what is really going on and likely to happen as the action of the story progresses” (Crossley, 2003, p.440), and through doing so generate a beginning, a middle and an end from historical events, controlling and placing order on complexity. Chronologically key events and their subsidiaries can be contextualised to offer discussion of the broader issues impacting upon events, giving a more robust and authentic picture of the wider process (Kevill et al., 2015).

Finally, specifically regarding entrepreneurs, as described by Johansson (2004) the life-story method provides a “rich and colourful understanding of how individual entrepreneurs are motivated and how to explore the diversity of motivations” (p.285), highlighting the usefulness of life story interviews in discovering motivations to continue to entrepreneur, highly pertinent for our study.

### 3.2 Research context and sample

To study authoring processes, we focused on the experiences of ex-offenders in the UK, stigmatised after being released into disempowering social structures but who, through entrepreneuring, attempt to reauthor their context. This research context is relevant for three reasons. Firstly, the UK prison system across categories of prison, represents a context which enforces restriction, explicitly removes agency and attempts to disempower the individual (Maruna, 2001; Bullock and Bunce, 2020). As such all participants have experienced the removal of their autonomy whilst imprisoned, to then have freedom 'regranted' upon release. This presents a unique opportunity to explore authoring as individuals attempt to regain their status and independence.

Secondly, the marginalisation of ex-offenders by society is well researched (Aresti, Eatough and Brooks-Gordon, 2010; Steve Kirkwood and McNeill, 2015; Rade, Desmarais and Burnette, 2018; Wesely, 2018). Upon release ex-offenders enter into a uniquely disempowering social structure where constraint continues to dynamically exert itself through stigmatisation and stereotyping, requiring authoring to be undertaken differently for individuals to affect a positive life change. As stereotyping takes hold of the ex-offender, the risk of dehumanisation increases, potentially evolving into the 'folk devil' "people whose very existence is socially constructed as posing a negative challenge and a grave threat to morality and who, as a result, provoke feelings of fear" (Brisman, Carrabine and South, 2017, p.177). Such exposure to this aspect of society impacts upon the individuals ability to maintain some sort of control over privacy of one's personal space in both the physical and emotional sense (Young, 1997). The loss of such privacy detrimentally disempowers the individual, weakening autonomy and self-esteem.

Thirdly, as all ex-offenders have undertaken entrepreneuring whilst inside prison, they have all developed latent and active entrepreneurial skillsets, providing a sense of parity when comparing across cases in identifying entrepreneurial actions. Of those who began to develop business ventures whilst imprisoned, these included a prison fitness magazine, an apprentice

training organisation, two ex-offender recruitment agencies, a DIY book publishing company, a television production company, and a skills training centre for young people out of education, employment or training.

All participants were located in the northwest of England. Sentencing time for our participants varied in relation to the type of offence, with a majority being in relation to drug dealing and assault. The average sentencing time for our sample is 5.3 years and the average time between release from prison and interview was 4.9 years. One of our participants had prior entrepreneurship experience before turning to criminal activity (drug dealing) leading to their arrest and imprisonment. Two further participants had criminal lifestyles for drug dealing before imprisonment, the remaining eight participants were all imprisoned upon their first offence and came from employed occupations.

To gain access to this population sampling was undertaken via initial gatekeepers from two UK northwest organisations who work with entrepreneurial ex-offenders, and then using a snowball procedure. Snowball sampling was especially suitable concerning the sensitive data of interest which for many could mean recalling a traumatic time period, requiring a level of trust and rapport to be established within the sample population in order to feel comfortable narrating their stories. The selection criteria required several considerations. All participants had to have spent time inside prison for crimes which did not include serious violence such as murder, rape, sexual offences, manslaughter or death by dangerous driving. This not only helped to ensure sentence timeframes would not be excessively varied, but research suggests the committing of such serious violent crimes promotes the presentation of neutralised identities as a stigma coping strategy and as a sense making process for the offender (Presser, 2004; Ferrito, Needs and Adshead, 2017; James and Gossett, 2018). By avoiding such criminal histories we attempt to mitigate this phenomenon and uncover relevant data. All participants were required to have undertaken entrepreneuring whilst inside prison. This allowed for relevant entrepreneurial skill sets to have already been developed upon release for a comparable

experience, whilst also providing a level 'motivational playing field' in that all participants held a shared goal of becoming an entrepreneur. Finally to help ensure accuracy of recall, all participants had to have been released for no more than five years at the time of the interviews, thus we were able to capture the experiences of individuals who not only engaged in entrepreneurial activity, but also began to experience positive change through doing so.

### 3.3 Data collection

In order to capture the processes undertaken by participants, life story interviews were able to reconstruct the key events and experiences from prison release to the date of interview, focussing upon the high and low points of this process as directed by participants.

After initial gatekeeper access was established and snowball sample procedures undertaken, interviews were arranged directly with participants via email. This involved a process of introductions with the research aims described, examples of narrative interviews discussed to assist with creative engagement, and consent forms agreed and signed with a date arranged for the first interview.

Prior to the first interview, two pilot interviews were conducted in person. This process helped to not only better organise the structure of the narrative interview process, but to also better understand how to appropriately collect such sensitive personal data from an at-risk sample population. As a result of hosting the pilot interviews the following insights were gained. Informed by literature exploring similar vulnerable populations (Mechanic and Tanner, 2007; Mooney, 2014; Pritchard-Jones, 2018), a 'neutral' environment to host the interviews was considered in attempt to avoid overtly formal spaces, such as university or business meeting rooms, which may have implied a sense of institutional formality and thus impacted upon the elicitation of life stories. As such a local coffee shop with enough background noise to mask conversations and afford a sense of informality and privacy was selected.

We discovered, however, that despite the relative relaxed and informal nature of the coffee shop space, participants often felt observed when responding to interview prompts, resulting

in a lowering of voice and a clipped answer. We interpreted this behaviour as a consequence of the lived stigmatised experience of the ex-offenders, inducing a feeling of public awareness of their status despite their being no-one present who knew the participants. This interpretation is supported by findings from research (Winnick and Bodkin, 2008; Sheppard and Ricciardelli, 2020; Wainwright and Muñoz, 2020), with results from service providers describing many vulnerable groups as becoming not only aware of their vulnerability, but also of the negative connotations narrated by society deeming them as 'deviants'.

Informed by these insights, interviews were conducted virtually via video call software with some participants choosing to use webcams, but most preferring to use their mobile phones. The result of this method was the creation of a portal into a very intimate space, with all choosing to take part from home. As such the quality and depth of data collected was much richer, with participants able to divert into wider contextual details, to freely revert back to previous key events, or to clarify terminology specific to the ex-offender probationary experience without fear of observation and judgement.

Data collection was conducted between December 2020 and January 2022, with interviews carried out across six months composed of up to three sessions with each participant. All sessions were audio recorded, transcribed and emailed to participants for conformation and clarification after each interview took place.

***Session 1.*** The first session was designed to capture the broad key event details which occurred since release from prison to the date of the interview. Participants were encouraged to reflect upon both the positive and negative circumstances, actions and events which help to narrate their entrepreneurial experiences. Through discussion encouragement was given to reflect upon subsequent events which occurred before or after the initial key events to uncover further event data. This being done, broad chapter labels emerged from discussion as a shorthand way to return to distinct time periods, aiding the non-chronological nature of memory recall, for example 'Living in London', 'Banned from Liverpool', 'Funding

Application', 'Terrorist Event'. This process created a 'narrative framework'. The framework was referred back to continuously to not only help participants make sense of their own story, but to also narrate how it changed over time, accounting for the broader socio-cultural patterns which occurred during the transformational process and impacted upon perception (Elliot, 2005). This first interview lasted up to an hour and ended with agreement from participants that what was discussed represented their experiences, and a request for them to continue to reflect upon what had been discussed in preparation for the second interview. This request was made to encourage further recall of event detail and context for the second interview.

***Session 2***. The second session took place approximately one week after the first interview and consisted of recapping the chapter labels, chronology and discussing the key events in much greater detail. With time for reflection previously encouraged, this session focussed upon the context around each event, the finer details now recalled as pertinent. This session induced much more circumstantial data, such as how funding applications were completed, what help was sought, and the personal feelings of being awarded financial sums. Here the goal was context and clarity, ensuring remarks seemingly spoken off-hand were followed up, attitudes portrayed regarding recalling certain experiences were questioned, and when relevant the checking of apparently disconnected events for connection. Focus was placed upon discourse, the pattern of events which framed each time period and how they connected. As an overall plot was established, participants actively reflected upon this, making sense of themselves as actors within it, as well as the actions which took place. Following Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012), as the interview progressed it was led by the participant yet kept in line with the overall research question in order to uncover highly salient perspectives of both larger and smaller events. This session lasted up to 90 minutes and in addition to ending with agreement of accuracy, also ended with a request for the participant to offer short term goals to be targeted within the following three months before the final interview. Short terms goals were discussed so as to gain current data which reflected the lived experience of entrepreneuring, as well as presenting an opportunity to capture the participants imagined future, representing how they

perceived themselves in a future state, their context and future capabilities.

***Session 3***. The last interview was conducted three months later, allowing for reflective space as well as an opportunity to work towards the short-term goals. Through conducting such longitudinal research participants were given the opportunity to alter data previously recorded as a consequence of recalling events previously overlooked. For some this meant a reinterpretation of key events or a greater emphasis upon certain contextual factors by way of explanation. As a final stage of the interview process the narrative framework was recalled back to participants with chapter labels included. Doing so added further clarification and validity to the data, ensuring a strong representation of chronology and salience.

### 3.4 Process-Tracing Data Analysis

An inductive multi-stage process-tracing design (Collier, 2011) was taken to analyse the data, providing "an analytic tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence—understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena" (p.824). Data analysis was divided into four iterative stages, allowing the development of descriptive inferences via considering sequence evidence regarding the spatial and temporal positioning of events, as well identifying critical junctures, focal points and empirical regularities across timelines (Muñoz, Cacciotti and Cohen, 2018).

***Stage one*** began during the first set of interviews, participants conveyed what they considered the key events which had taken place from the time of release up to the time of the interview, pertinent to both the entrepreneurial and personal journey they had undertaken. Chapter titles were assigned during the conversation by the author with approval from the participant. This was initially completed in a lose manner, to avoid disruption to the narrative flow as participants were afforded time to deviate along tangents and elaborate areas they considered important. Upon listening back to interviews it became clear that some titles benefitted from redrafting to depict the content emerging more accurately, or new titles needed adding to better convey the overall narrative plot. Once retitling was completed, chapter titles

were sent back to participants for clarification and agreement of revision. This iterative process was repeated during interviews two and three.

During ***Stage 2*** we used process tracing methods to begin coding events within life narratives. Working in an iterative recursive manner allowed for reviewing themes within one narrative, noting these down and comparing to themes in other narratives, with axial coding developing as themes were established. Through a process of re-reading narratives this produced five markers (see figure 1): Marker 1: Whether a key event was experienced as a *stabilising* event. We see this type of event exampled in participant two's map (and in all others) as a blue square marker, here representing a decision to take employment within an unsatisfactory job they last undertook as a teenager, labouring on a builders yard. Marker 2: Whether a key event was experienced as a form of constraint *externally produced,* depicted as a yellow circle within process maps and exampled with participant three, who's first marker upon release represents their experience of being underwhelmed and feeling as though they were still imprisoned at home due to lockdown restrictions at the time. Marker 3: Whether a key event was experienced as a form of constraint *self-induced,* depicted as a brown circle within process maps and exampled by participant eight who's last marker represents a decision taken to hide their last name from their business network for fear of past criminality being discovered. Marker 4: Whether an event was experienced as *stigmatizing,* represented as a red triangle and exampled by participant six who obtained new employment shortly after release but was dismissed after colleagues discovered and shared his (already disclosed) imprisonment. Marker 5: Whether the individual *took entrepreneurial action*, depicted as a green diamond within process maps and exampled by participant four, who's first entrepreneurial action represents registering their business with the UK Companies House after Police travel restrictions were lifted.

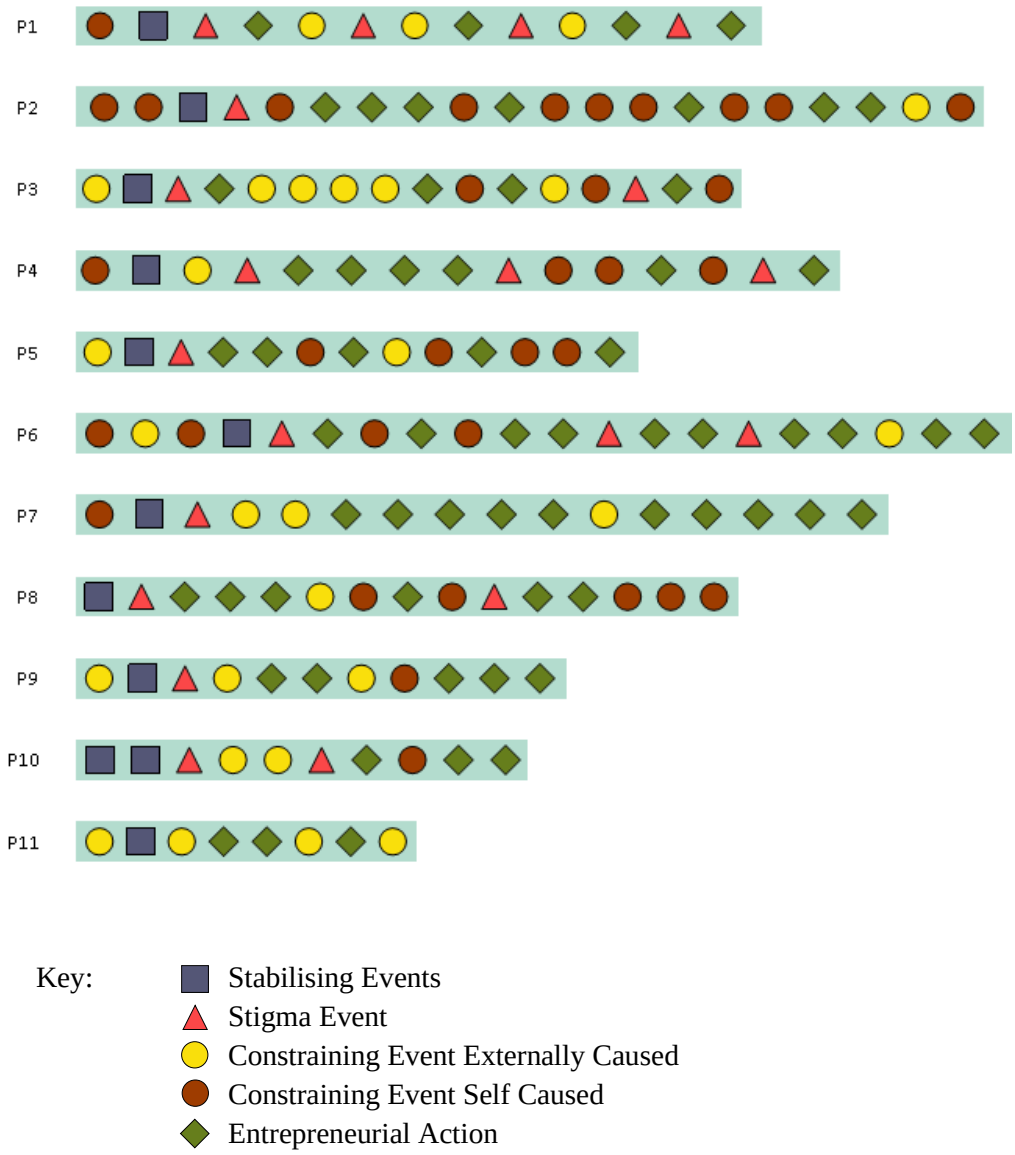


**Figure 1: Thematic Process Maps**

Interpreting narratives through process tracing analysis produces a varied collection of timelines in regard to length of participant maps. This is due to the nature of events recalled and analysed varying in regard to the temporal duration between events (for some participants several months covers many events during a period of change and decision making, whereas for others the same duration sees no change), as well as length of time spent post release before interviews were conducted. For example participant 11 has a relatively short process map in comparison to others, partially due to having been released from prison for the shortest amount of time (6 months), but also due to the external networks built whilst inside prison providing

opportunities to act quickly regarding entrepreneuring and forms of employment. Once a network is found which offers a sense of security towards their ex-offender status without a feeling of being stigmatised, this is secured and helps to maintain a sense of stability for a longer duration of time.

During stage 2 we also noticed two distinct periods of 'passivity' and 'action', with regards to entrepreneurial action. As all participants had gained entrepreneurial experience within prison and narrated expectations to entrepreneur upon release, this was an interesting discovery. Here we observed how after release all participants experienced a period of passivity, with a delay in commencing entrepreneuring, until after a certain period of time, entrepreneurial action commences (Figure 2).

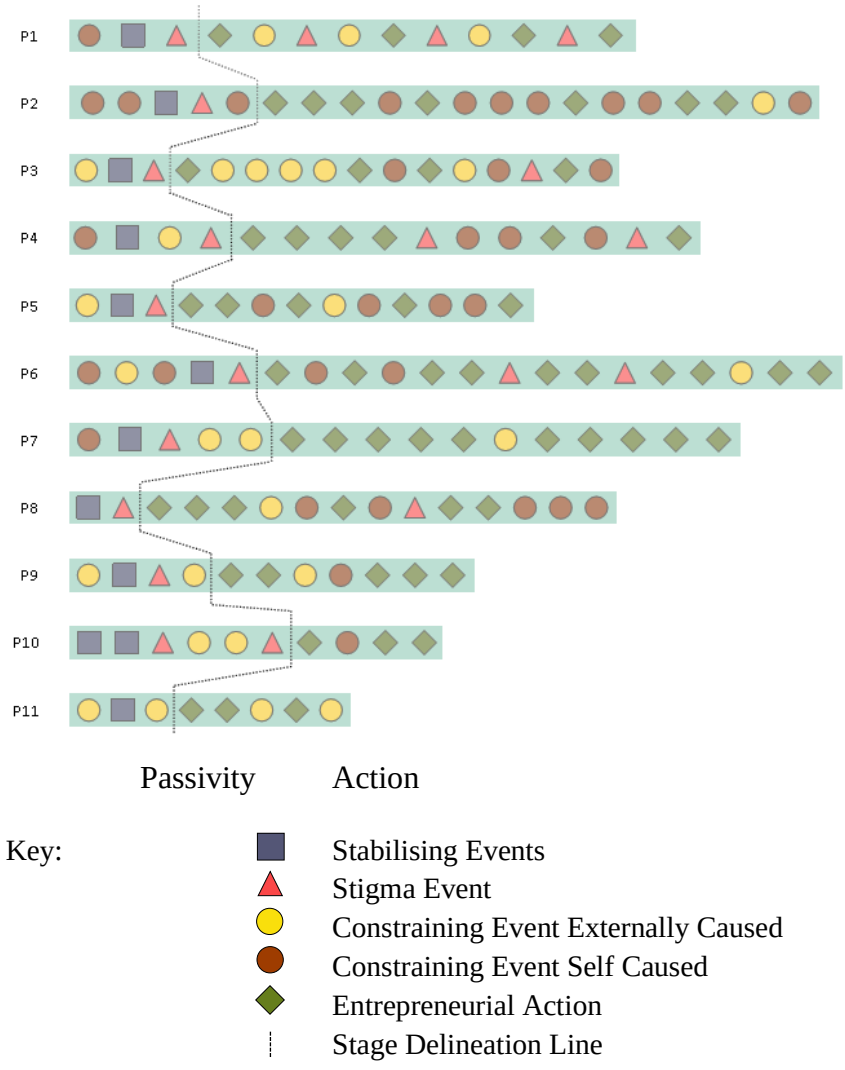


**Figure 2: Passivity and Action stages**

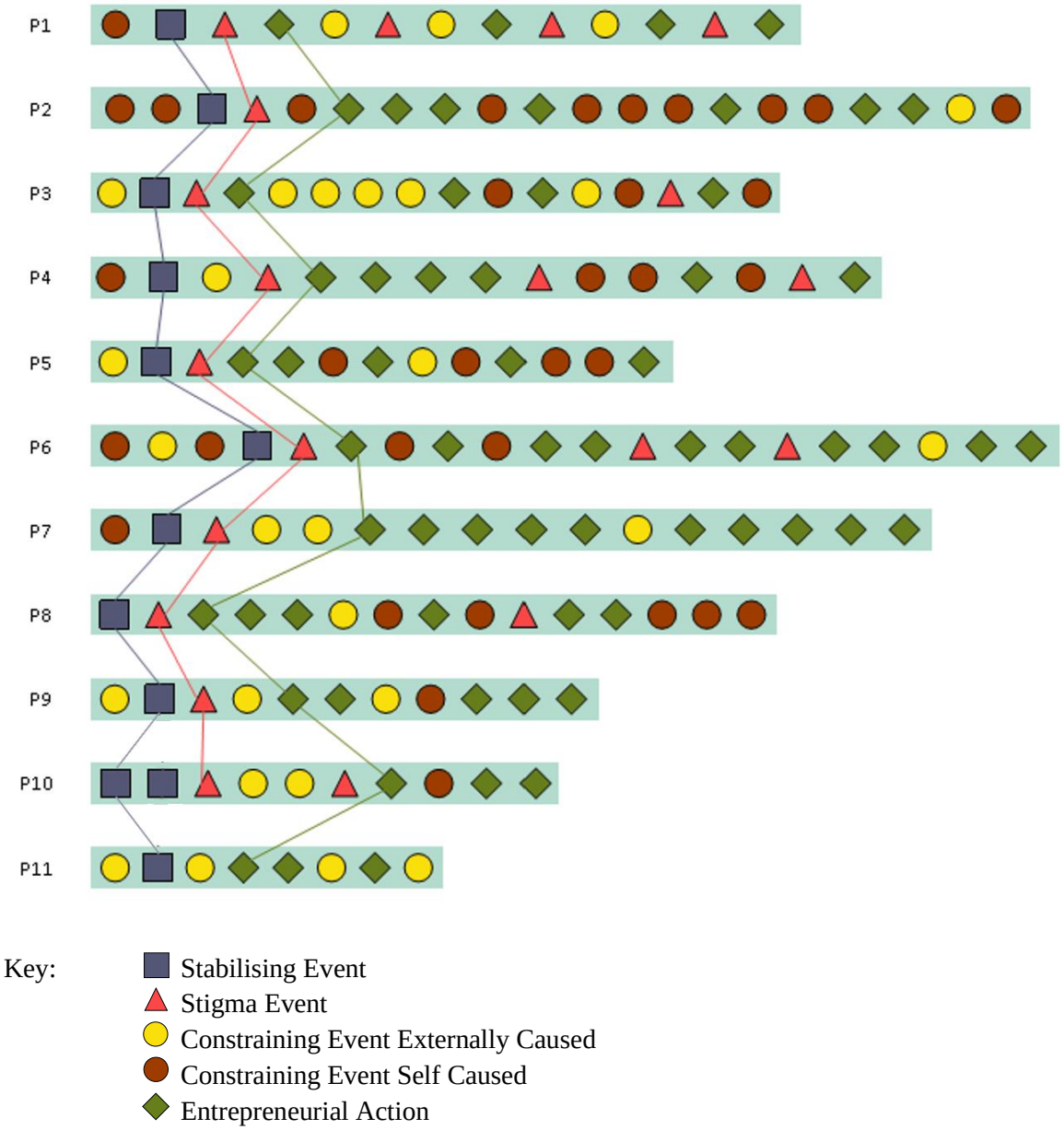


**Figure 3: Empirical Regularities Across Cases**


**Figure 4: Overcoming and Accommodating Constraint Groupings – Constraining events occurring after entrepreneuring commences**

During ***Stage 3*** we looked across cases to examine empirical regularities (Figure 3). Here, the coding of events highlighted patterns of events which allowed for theorizing on causal chains. Across cases we observed that upon release from prison, all participants focus upon stabilising their lived experience in the face of restarting their lives whilst coming to terms with their new status within a disempowering society (highlighted in Figure 3 by the connected blue squares). This sequence of events seemed to end with a greater collection of stigmatizing experiences (highlighted by the red triangles in Figure 3). Participants then began to create

change via entrepreneuring (the green Entrepreneurial Action diamonds in Figure 3). This process appeared the same across all participants, displaying a synchronous starting process.

Additionally across cases it became clear that two distinct equifinal pathways were emerging according to the type of response participants narrated – accommodating or overcoming constraints. 'Overcoming constraint' participants appeared to have a greater frequency of self-induced constraints (x23) compared to those attributed to external causes (x4) occurring after entrepreneuring commenced, across their process maps (depicted with larger brown circles within Figure 4). Here we observed a trend across cases of decision making where despite alternative options being available, a pathway was chosen where constraint was manifested. For example participant four experienced stigma when interacting with potential supplier partners who refused to do business because of their criminal record. They responded by successfully sourcing alternative suppliers, experiencing growth, but then rejecting future business offers from the initial supplier which they reflect would have benefitted their business. We interpretated these responses as manifesting and then 'overcoming' constraint.

Conversely, we observed 'accommodating constraint' with participants narrating constraint more frequently to be caused by external influences (x12) occurring after entrepreneuring commenced, which they choose to leave unchallenged, as compared to those constraints attributed to the self (x4) (Figure 4). For example, participant one experienced stigma when bumping into an old neighbour on the high street who belittled his past deviance, he responded by smiling, seeking agreement and making light of the conversation, yet recalling he felt angry at the time. We interpreted this response as 'accommodating constraint'.

In ***stage 4*** we leveraged these ideas with the aim of further abstracting our findings to elaborate as a process of authoring within a disempowering stigmatizing social structure. Our presentation of the mechanism of authoring employs the notions of 'overcoming constraint' and 'accommodating constraint', which is marked by two distinct pathways. We summarize our analysis of pathways in Figure 5. Within this pathway chart we observe how the distinct

series of events which take place for participants are contextually embedded within a disempowering societal structure, influencing decisions made at each step and through interaction with context, progresses the individual towards a pivot point. Here one of two pathways from a position of stability are taken in attempt to resolve a heightened awareness of constraint, either the seeking of a structure of power, or an attempt at taking personal ownership of constraint. Both pathways represent distinct authoring strategies in attempt at gaining agency and control of the lived experience. From summarising our data analysis, we can now theorise upon pathways and consider the causal mechanisms involved.

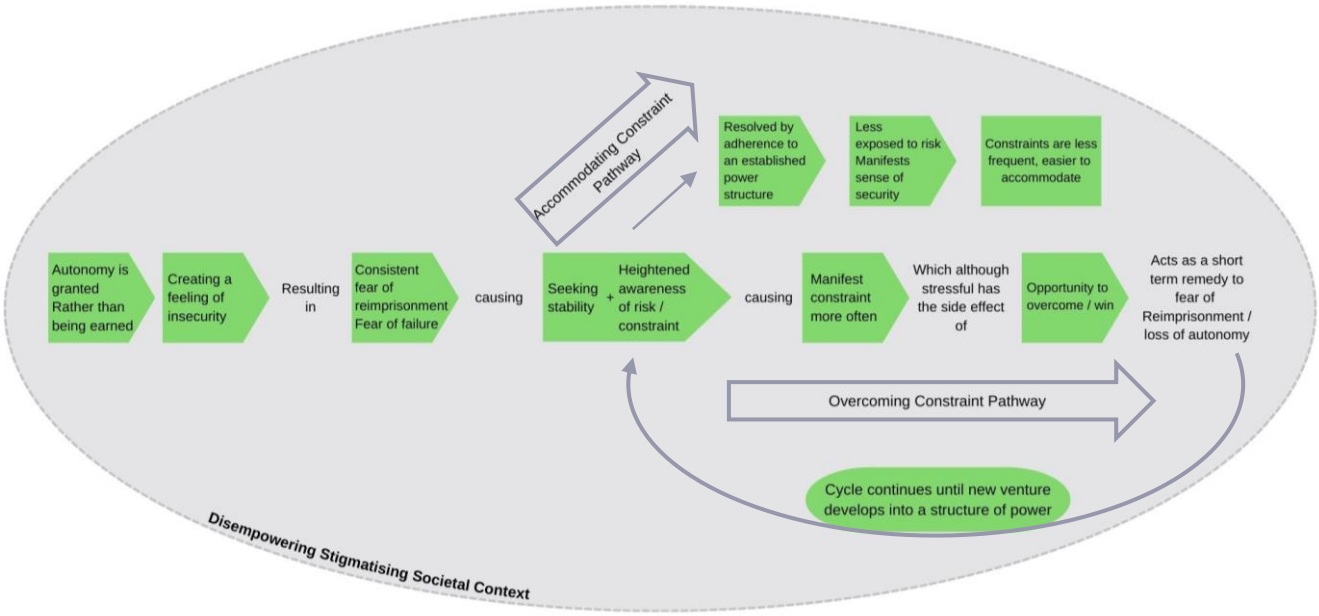


**Figure 5: Pathway Chart Accommodating vs Overcoming Constraint**

## 3.5 Establishing Causal Mechanisms

Through process tracing we aim to build theory in answer to uncovering what constitutes the 'black box' between condition X and Y. Taking empirical material and applying a structured analysis we can move from descriptive to causal inferences, building a plausible causal mechanism explaining how a cause is linked to an outcome (Beach, 2017), and how causal forces are conveyed through a series of interconnected events. For our study, condition X (our initial condition) was considered as the event of freedom being granted, releasing participants into a disempowering societal context. We also established through sample selection that participants had reached a stage of feeling a sense of control over stigmatisation through

entrepreneuring, achieving agency (condition Y). From gathering the empirical material of participant narratives, we could test the *sequential evidence* (the spatial and temporal chronology of events predicted by a causal mechanism), against established theory – emancipatory entrepreneuring, with the resultant inferred causal mechanisms and identified imprinters represented in table one below.

| | **Pathway 1** | **Pathway 2** |
|---|---|---|
| **Initial condition** | Entrepreneurs are granted freedom from restriction, released into a disempowering social structure. Entrepreneur brings with them experience of entrepreneuring whilst under restriction. | |
| **Part 1** | Entrepreneurs recognize that stigmatisation and constraint endure outside of prison restriction. Freedom is bounded by a fear of freedom instability, inducing hyper-vigilance to a re-loss of freedom. | |
| **Part 2** | Stability is sought by entrepreneurs seeking structure and space to take action against restriction. Decisions are made quickly to bring a sense of reassurance. | |
| **Part 3** | Stabilization induces passivity. Entrepreneurs continue to endure stigmatisation without taking action to overcome. Autonomy exists but is without agency. | |
| **Part 4** | Entrepreneur endures continued restriction until a decision is made to affect change. Each entrepreneur has a different limit of stigma endurance. | |
| **Part 5** | Entrepreneur chooses to engage with stigma. Venture creation begins. | Entrepreneur chooses to avoid stigmatising mechanisms via engagement with established structures of power within society. |
| **Part 6** | Entrepreneur makes use of venture to manifest controllable constraint. Stigma still occurs yet is able to be overcome, validating the sense of autonomy. Entrepreneurial problem-solving narratives are employed. | Entrepreneur adopts the norms and values of established power structure to enable use of 'employee' narratives. Stigmatisation and restrictions towards the self are identified and overcome through accommodation and subtle declarations of identity. |
| **Outcome** | Entrepreneur experiences the ability to choose what action to take to define new social arrangements, attempting to reorganise the context of existing structures to foster ownership of the self from a disempowering context. | |

**Table 1: Conceptualizations of causal mechanisms and their parts for Pathways 1 and 2**

Inspired by Muñoz, Cacciotti and Cohen (2018), table 2 presents the theorised causal inferences reported in table 1, explaining how each event is necessarily connected to the next.

| **Inferred Relationship (X → Y)** | **Deductive Reasoning and Evidence** |
|---|---|
| *Path 1 and 2*<br>Initial condition X → Freedom Granted<br>Chain begins with all entrepreneurs granted freedom and an intention to entrepreneur. | Entrepreneurs as ex-offenders are released from prison into a disempowering social structure. 'Ex-offenders' attract stigma within society. Entrepreneur brings with them experience of entrepreneuring whilst inside prison and an intention of |

| | |
|---|---|
| | displaying agency. Pathway cannot commence without the intention to achieve agency. |
| Freedom granted → Fear of freedom loss<br>Social interactions enforce stigma. Opportunities to freely enact agency are discredited, promoting uncertainty towards freedom status. | All entrepreneurs recount stigmatising experiences alongside experiencing freedom. Stigmatisation is linked to ex-offender status and presumed behavioural intentions portrayed in media and from personal networks. Continued stigmatisation regarding self-worth enforces paranoia of freedom being removed. Entrepreneurs discuss Police and potential employers automatically knowing their ex-offender status without prior notice. |
| Stability sought → abatement of insecurity<br>Uncertainty towards freedom status is resolved through gaining a sense of certainty and stability. Entrepreneurs quickly take employment or housing opportunities. | Convinced freedom is fragile and can be removed, all entrepreneurs seek a safe and predictable context. Shortly after release, despite prior entrepreneurial intentions, entrepreneurs take employment recounted as a 'step backwards', or housing with elderly parents or in locations removed from personal networks yet which provide immediate housing. Having a safe home and stable employment are viewed as key stabilizing factors for ex-offenders to avoid criminality. |
| Passivity towards agency → no control over stigma<br>Gaining stability promotes passivity towards achieving agency. Entrepreneurs delay taking further entrepreneurial action and continue to experience stigma without taking mitigating action. | Entrepreneurs engage in stabilizing actions for varied lengths of time, during which no entrepreneuring is recounted. Opportunities for commencing venture development are stalled. Stigmatisation continues to be recounted, with the ex-offender status and implied deviance kept present for each entrepreneur. Key stigmatising events present across narratives during this period. Questions about personal history entail either deception or 'outing' oneself as an ex-offender. |
| Endurance of stigma → refocus to enact change<br>Accrual of stigma experienced from a 'secure' stabilized position offers reflective space to refocus and take entrepreneurial action | Reflective space allows for planning entrepreneurial action to help mitigate stigma. During this stage on process maps stigma events are followed by entrepreneurial events, not present beforehand. A sense of feeling overwhelmed is no longer discussed. Intention to seek change enters into narratives. Entrepreneurs take stock of opportunities to either craft a new space or to attempt to enter into an already existing space where stigma and threats to freedom are mitigated. |
| *Path 1*<br>Decision to enact change → venture creation<br>Venture development plans are undertaken alongside an awareness of continued stigma experiences, restricting opportunities | Key network actors are engaged with, mentors are sought out and funding bodies are contacted to help support early stages of growth. In doing so the entrepreneur exposes themselves to stigma within the public / business sphere by either refusing or being unable to hide ex-offender status. Some institutions and individuals display stigma towards past imprisonment, hindering venture growth. |
| *Path 1*<br>Entrepreneurial narratives employed → stigma becomes operationalised<br>Entrepreneurs discover the ability to absorb stigma and constraint within established entrepreneurial narratives, providing opportunity to enact control of stigma | As part of venture development established narratives are conveyed within entrepreneurial networks and media, promoting problem solving and overcoming challenges. Entrepreneurs engage with these narratives to create opportunity with constraint, constructing surmountable constraining events which convey ability to both the surrounding others and themselves. Patterns of unexpected delays, inefficiency in decision making and passed opportunities present during this stage. Constraining events are later overcome providing 'legitimisation' of traditional entrepreneurial narratives. Control over constraint is experienced. |
| *Path 1*<br>Continued employment of entrepreneurial narratives → Y, agency development<br>A sense of control and agency develop against a societal context of constraint | Venture development grows to provide space for the enactment of control over constraint. Entrepreneurial events increase during this stage as stigma events reduce. Perceptions of self-ability to enact change persist. Discussion of goals and objectives are described as achievable. |
| *Path 2* | In seeking to mitigate detrimental narratives of the 'ex-offender', entrepreneurs identify opportunity to adopt a new narrative aligned with an established institution. Space to enact |

| | |
|---|---|
| Decision to enact change → adopting narratives of 'normalcy' within an established power structure<br>Institutions offering a defined space where narratives of professionalism can be enacted are identified | a sense of control over constraining events is exploited within institutional brackets. Narratives include seeking promotion, the importance of status symbols such as company cars and office space. Institutional phraseology and a sense of pride of position are conveyed. |
| *Path 2*<br>Normalcy narratives → accommodation of stigmatisation<br>Stigma events continue to occur within institutions, yet these are absorbed as part of a new professional identity conveyed through actions | By adopting the professional narrative, entrepreneurs accept a bracketing of social norms and values specific to the institution. In doing so they accept a subtle level of stigma present in everyday interactions. Through accommodating such stigma, a sense of power is achieved over it. Evidenced through the acceptance of and participation in events which exploit ex-offender status, yet do not induce a threat of loss to freedom. Through doing so stigma is construed as a resource, consciously operationalised |
| *Path 2*<br>Continued employment of normalcy narratives → Y, agency development<br>A sense of control and agency develop against a societal context of constraint | A stable space is created where acceptance of past deviance is experienced by surrounding others and the institution of power. Understanding of how to manipulate narratives of professionalism can be employed to control stigma events. Agency and control over context is experienced. A feeling of being locked into this new space forms as fear of needing to rebuild such a space in a new institution are acknowledged. Future ambitions of new homes, holidays and promotions are conveyed and connected to the ability to continue to display adherence to institutional norms and values. |

**Table 2: Theorised Causal Inference**

## 4 Findings

Emancipatory entrepreneuring often assumes a progressively linear process of emancipation, with individuals carried from restriction towards liberation through the venture creation process. Rindova, Barry and Ketchen (2009) explain a key aspect of this process is the enabling of authoring, as individuals attempt to mitigate, outmanoeuvre, or reorganise detrimental, stigmatizing social systems. However, literature assumes that emancipation and entrepreneuring work in conjunction as individuals seek to overcome constraints. Through our analyses, we found something different. Upon being granted freedom, individuals re-enter into a disempowering social arrangement, experiencing stigmatisation and a consistent fear of autonomy loss which we conceptualise as a stage of passivity. Individuals are then triggered to engage in alternative practices to manage this fear, configuring two authoring strategies, characterised by alternative multi-stage pathways attempting to maintain autonomy and agency. Both pathways have common beginnings and endings.

### 4.1 Common beginning: Fear of Autonomy Loss and Passive Autonomy

As a marginalised social group, ex-offenders experience a unique situation of transitioning from a context of extreme constraint and loss of autonomy within the prison system, to one of freedom being *granted* upon release. Frequently within EE literature research highlights the ability of entrepreneuring as a process to bring about autonomy, a process of diligent effort to earn liberation via various means and strategies (Joseph and Selvaraj, 2010; Al-Dajani et al., 2015; Chandra, 2017; Barragan, Erogul and Essers, 2018). Through entrepreneuring individuals suffering from poverty find opportunities to e.g. bricolage (Mair and Marti, 2009), to form protective matriarchal cooperatives (Datta and Gailey, 2012), or to exploit family resources to maintain a secondary enterprise income (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016). From such (re)organising strategies a pathway out of restriction/oppression is created, and with it a knowing confidence that if one was to fall victim to e.g poverty once again, strategies now exist to support further emancipation.

A difference for ex-offenders however concerns the fact that they are *granted* their freedom by virtue of societal rules and expectations, rather than having earned or 'entrepreneured' it. From data analysis this produces two immediate consequences. Firstly, by having freedom granted, ex-offenders know that for them, autonomy and freedom is fragile and at risk of being taken away again. No matter what (re)organising efforts are undertaken, should reimprisonment occur, they become impotent in their ability to effect change. We see this fear reflected across all participant narratives. Participant 11 below describes how for them the fear of re-losing freedom represents a fear of losing time and life opportunities:

> "I'd be absolutely gutted to lose everything that I've got, because my girlfriend would probably go, I'd lose my job … I don't want to ever do that again, it's a waste of time, you don't realise how precious time is, the time that I've wasted and will never get back ... it's always in my head, thinking about it" (P11)

Participant 3 describes how the fear of losing freedom is ever present and is experienced as a very fragile and almost daily threat which requires constant vigilance:

> "so it's always there in the back your head the fact that God I could be out and a fight breakout. Or I can be driving and run someone over, wrong place wrong time. You know, you're at a party and someone's selling drugs, sort of thing and the like, you know, the police came in. The first person they're going to look at is me because of what I done sort of thing. So, you've always got half of that in your, in your head when you say you go out for a drink or something like that" (P3)

Despite participant 5 using their freedom to build a successful business which now provides a source of wealth and stability, maintaining such success represented a greater potential loss, which was realised when they experienced a threat to their freedom due to an investigation by the UK Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, taking their sense of wellbeing to a very low point:

> "You know I went to prison [feeling] as minus 70%, my gang master investigation [taking place approx. 1 year after release] was minus 60%. The thought of going back to prison was terrifying for me and I worry about it" (P5)

Secondly, as a consequence of having freedom granted, upon release from prison participants enter into a state of 'passive autonomy', whereby freedom from constraint is not capitalised upon via entrepreneuring, but rather the disempowering societal structure overwhelms the individual. This is a surprising finding considering all of our participants became known for being entrepreneurial in prison and for some actively began venture development in prison. As is depicted in figure 2 however, all participants experience this non-entrepreneuring stage. We observe that despite being 'freed', for many this experience does not trigger a joyous 'fresh start' perspective, instead participant 1 describes being released below as a similar feeling to being sent to prison:

> "So for me it was like, it was tough being released so there's that whole thing, I got my head down and got through it but coming out and then just like trying to process what happened to you, knowing that you've kind of lost lots of material things and all your status and everything, and it takes a lot, it's a long time to readjust as well, I think being released from prison in terms of the adjustment period, it's just this kind of, it's just as much of a headfuck when you get released out of prison as it is going in. So if you think somebody like me, never been in prison before, that was a huge kind of culture shock, but getting released was just as much … it's just kind of as upsetting really. Yeah a strange phenomenon" (P1)

Participant 1 experiences the impact of overcoming an oppressive context through being granted freedom rather than having e.g entrepreneured their way out of poverty, formed a

supportive network to overthrow an institution or law, or experienced an identity transition leading to a sense of empowerment. In all of these examples a person develops as an individual and psychologically benefits through increased resilience, self-worth and self-belief, a process of *gaining*. As participant 1 describes the experience of release however, this is a process of *loss*, "you've kind of lost lots of material things and all your status and everything, and it takes a lot, it's a long time to readjust" (P1). The experience of attempting to regain autonomy within a disempowering social system is conveyed by participant 10 and participant 3, who both describe how they felt trapped by the society they re-entered despite being free:

> "I mean the release was a boost but then, and this opportunity of doing [possible employment] seemed great, but then it did kind of become, I don't know, almost like I was trapped in something a bit." (P10)

> "It's been fine but it's weird. I suppose it's like going from prison to prison…. Yeah, and I suppose it was quite muted in one sense. It was nice to have the ability just to go and pick up my son when I wanted to, or go and pick him up from school and so on. So that was the nicest thing about it, the biggest difference. But I don't even really…it was the same as prison" (P3)

The anticlimactic nature of being released from prison is not unique to this sample population, with many studies explaining how barriers to 're-entry' for ex-offenders consist in the form of difficulty finding housing, employment, fractured family ties and negative peer pressure (Davis, Bahr and Ward, 2013; Ricciardelli and Mooney, 2018; LaCourse et al., 2019). Over-arching these barriers, are the experiences of stigma and discrimination, which often result in ex-offenders enduring differential and discriminatory treatment, resulting for some in pathways back to re-offending (Rade, Desmarais and Burnette, 2018). Although each release experience is unique for each individual, we observe in our sample that this passive stage endures until action is taken to help *stabilise* both the fear of a loss of freedom and the continued experience of restriction.

### 4.2 From Passivity to Action: Stabilising Events

The consequence of experiencing the continued fear of re-losing freedom, is a consistent sense of insecurity which is proven to be valid through societal stigma aimed at ex-offenders. For this group the feeling of constraint does not end with freedom being granted. Rather all

participants experience being bounded by a constant scanning for risk continually fed by stigmatisation. This sense of risk to freedom is depicted across process maps with the subsequent occurrence of *stabilising events.* These are actions undertaken to help mediate the sense of risk and instability to freedom by creating a sense of structure and stability in their lived experience. Literature has widely covered the positive impacts upon recidivism stabilising actions can have, explaining the importance of securing early pro-social networks (Brunton-Smith and McCarthy, 2017), employment (Berg and Huebner, 2011), or relocation away from past deviant activities (Bell, Butler and Lawther, 2021). Our results show similar pro-social actions being undertaken at the early stage of release, but in a different manner. Rather than being undertaken as part of a probationary plan or with long term focus, these actions are undertaken quickly, without significant planning, and often with later regret. Such stabilising events support the initial stage of passivity as they allow participants to 'stay afloat', to keep treading water but not in any particular direction. Participant 2 describes this passive acceptance of restriction with how, after leaving prison, they took employment back in a role they now saw as beneath them and continued to experience stigma

> "so roughly around about three months maybe [post-release] I ended up working in a builders merchants which is something that I had done when I was 16 / 17 so it felt like a complete reset then, so I wasn't like depressed but I was probably like, I was probably level. Probably just like this ain't great… reality set in now because I'd generally thought I'd given up on the whole thing with the magazine I think I'd even given up meeting up with [mentor] at one point because I thought there's no point, it's not going anywhere, and every time I had to meet him I'd have to take a day off work, and knowing that, and obviously you google stuff [about yourself], you listen to people" (P2)

Participant 10 describes how they moved cities on the basis of a job offer made early after release but then reflects how it impacted upon their family and sense of control

> "I wasn't really feeling it to be honest, you know, my family were missing me and stuff. It seemed like a great plan at the time but I was only, I wasn't even driving at that point, I had a motorbike and it was a mission… from there when I was having like one day off because I was trying to get as much money as possible and on that one day off I was pretty tired from work … and I thought, this isn't the right thing to do, I've got an hour, an hour and a half to get home to see my family and then I've got to get back I'm in work tomorrow and I just thought this isn't really where I want to be now" (P10)

Stabilising events take place as an initial coping strategy to help counter the constant sense

of vigilance required towards threats to freedom. As we observe across process maps however, despite these stabilising events, passivity regarding taking action towards stigmatisation and the fear of loss of freedom continues.

Yet it is from a place of stability that individuals feel secure enough to begin to take action and control over their stigmatised lived experience. This process is highlighted in figure 3, as participants are triggered to move from a stage of passivity regarding how they interact with stigma, to taking action with entrepreneuring. Each individual has their own limit of how much stigma and lack of control they can tolerate for any length of time, impacted upon by how stable and secure they feel their current lived experience is. All participants however reach a point following stigmatising experiences of commencing entrepreneuring, of taking action.

Here our participants divide along two pathways, each employing entrepreneuring differently to engage with stigma and constraint. Five participants choose to face stigmatisation head on, we observe language which describes awareness of stigma and confrontation of the challenges it presents within a disempowering society, we describe this below as Pathway One. For these participants a decision is made to incorporate the activity of striving to overcome stigma into their narrative. This is a strategy of *exposure*, of finding safety from the fear of freedom loss by keeping the threat out in the open where it can not only be observed but also manipulated. Alternatively six of the participants choose to seek *protection* from stigma, deciding to accommodate constraint and stigma in a new protective social arrangement within the wider disempowering societal context. Here participants choose to avoid challenging stigmatisation and instead attempt to use authoring to maintain a sense of autonomy by not alerting others to their ex-offender status and inducing reprimand actions. Each pathway will be explored in detail below.

## 4.3 Pathways to agency

### 4.31 Pathway One – Overcoming Constraint

Progressing from an initial shared stage of being overwhelmed by the fear of losing freedom, pathway one participants endure stigmatising experiences and engage in stabilising events in attempt at creating some sort of control and stability. Stigmatisation and feelings of restriction to freedom persist and accumulate until this group are triggered to seek control over their lived experience through entrepreneurial action (highlighted on figure 6). We note however that from the trigger point onwards within the process maps, these participants recall 23 self-constraining events (indicated by large brown circles), and only 4 externally caused constraining events (indicated by yellow circles) whilst entrepreneuring. Also of note is that we do not observe a linear progression of either entrepreneuring events followed by a period of constraint (suggesting a failed entrepreneurial endeavour), nor of an initial period of constraint which is overcome and followed by liberating entrepreneuring. Rather we find constraint and entrepreneuring occurring concurrently, often interspersed, as displayed in Figure 6.

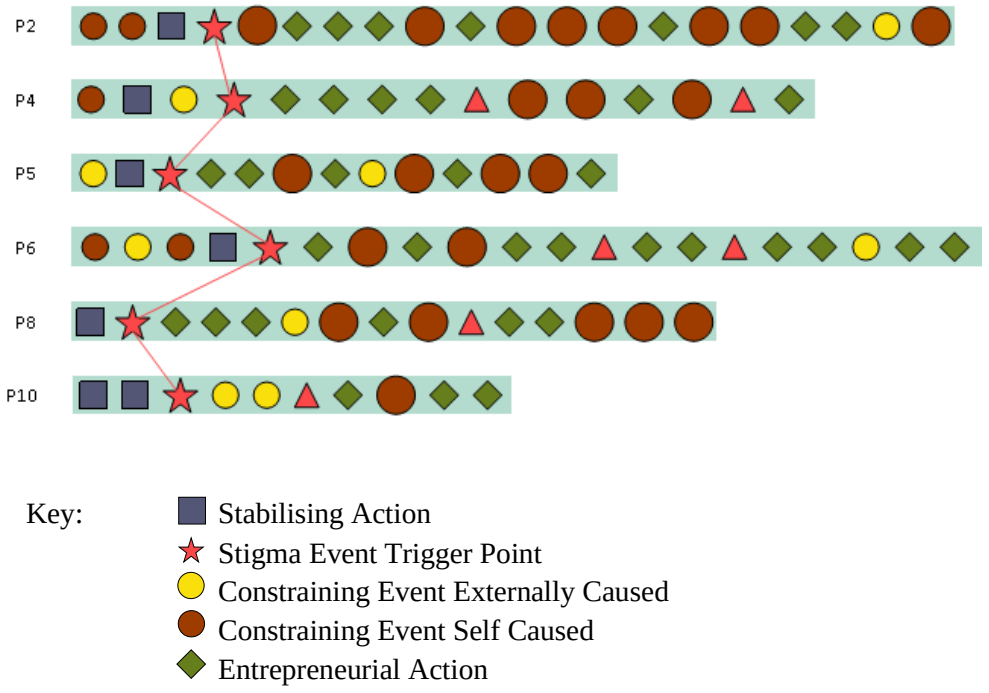


**Figure 6: Pathway One Overcoming Constraint Group – Stigmatising trigger event and subsequent frequency of self-constraining events**

Pathway one reveals an authoring strategy enacted to exploit stable yet stigmatising social and economic relationships, attempting to resolve the risk of autonomy loss through the manifestation and overcoming of constraint, producing opportunities to experience earned autonomy through entrepreneuring. From data analysis we observe a form of constraint which presents surmountable, controllable challenges to be overcome. Frequently these are constraints brought about by a choice from the entrepreneur to either innovate or delay. Should such events be observed infrequently within narratives it would appear sensible to assume naivety, observing a pattern within cases however displays a habit, and across cases a trend. Participant 3 describes one such action they took below, whereby an opportunity to continue to grow their business with a business mentor was identified, reflected upon, and chosen not to pursue.

> "And these people are great I've met some great contacts, but at the end of it, you still, you need to rely on number one, and you're the only person who is going to make things happen. If you rely on others, you'll often be let down, and they don't do it on purpose, a lot of the time, people don't do it on purpose. I'm not saying I've not let people down. But ultimately… I've just basically kept my circle a bit smaller" (P3)

Participant 3 would later describe how they had subsequently sought out business support but only after constraining the growth of the business. A similar self-constraining event is described by participant 5 whereby their business is rapidly established and beginning to grow through achieving external contracts and business support, and yet they describe how they 'paused':

> "so that was fine that was good… so fast forward a year and I'd say we were at minus 20% because we've not been delivering on that contract, money was really tight and we didn't have the right systems or processes in place… So it was like poor management performance, yeah all of that, I just paused" (P5)

Participant 5 later describes how they decided to overcome this constraint by hiring new staff, an option available to them at the time of pausing:

> "but that was available before the poor performance, she was probably you know, she was brilliant, 20% again, 20% plus and you know, [colleague] joined in May and then… Yeah that was a big deal for us" (P5)

Participant 2 also experienced an early rapid growth in their business development and

began to secure distribution contracts for their magazine. Growth stalled however and after identifying the flaw in their strategy, rather than pivoting, they chose to continue as they were, as described below:

> "so you have to go to these courses every month, and sometimes it would be twice a month and I suppose hearing what other people were doing, in regards to the growth of their businesses and what we were doing, that's when we realised, this isn't going the way we thought it would go… so we knew that was a barrier we faced, in regards to where we were feeling with the magazine, we were again probably round about 20%, we were happy we were in [venues] … we'd done a huge print run and then realised probably round about 4 months after that initial print run that the uptake was very very slow and I kind of just dragged" (P2)

Participant 2 reflects however that this problem was always surmountable:

> "We had no real, if you look at it there's no real funding pot for it, there's no… looking back at it now… there is ... But at the time, [we thought], who's going to fund printing a magazine for prisons, it felt like it was very difficult to justify how we would get it" (P2)

Participant 4 describes how whilst growing their business they encountered stigma regarding their ex-offender status from potential contracts, and then after experiencing growth found those same contracts wanting to engage in business. Despite admitting the need for such income at the time, participant 4 intentionally turns down the opportunity, described in the below quote:

> "You had your chance, you made me do a lot of work a lot of paperwork and then you just didn't want to work with me, so I said what makes you want to work with me now? Because you know I've been on another year and a half and you know I'm going to smash it? A lot of these people are just greedy bastards, all's they're interested in is money money money to line their own pockets… all's they do is just say yeah this is a brilliant idea let me put you through to my PA and all's they do is just pass you from pillar to post, so I just 'fuck them off', me, and go you know I've never needed you in my life I'm not going to need you again so I'll just do whatever, I'll get no help from them, but I welcome it" (P4)

Across participants within this group we find evidence of manifesting constraining events, which later are overcome with entrepreneuring either through a delayed innovative response or prompted through an external influence (such as Covid-19, Government policy change). Throughout narratives a pattern emerges of frequent self-induced constraint followed by entrepreneuring. None of the constraints manifested result in business closure. The result of

this strategy however is a feeling of control over the risk of autonomy loss, continued entrepreneuring, and continued constraint reconstruction.

### 4.32 Pathway Two – Accommodated Constraint

Progressing from an initial shared stage of being overwhelmed by the fear of losing freedom, pathway two participants also endure stigmatising experiences (highlighted on figure 7) whilst undertaking stabilising actions until they are triggered to seek control. We note that from the trigger point onwards however, once entrepreneuring has begun this group recall only 4 self-constraining events (indicated by a brown circle), and 12 externally caused constraining events (indicated by a yellow circle). Similar to pathway one we do not observe a linear progression of either entrepreneuring events followed by a period of constraint, nor of an initial period of constraint which is overcome and followed by liberating entrepreneuring. Rather entrepreneuring and constraint remain interspersed.

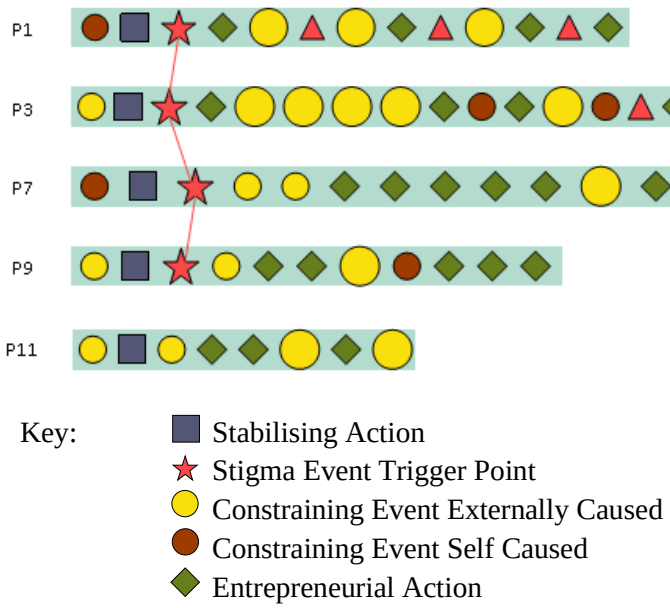


**Figure 7: Pathway Two Accommodating Constraint Group – Stigmatising trigger event and subsequent frequency of external-constraining events**

Pathway Two sees a different form of authoring strategy, one of protection, which recognises the power of accommodating externally produced constraints to gain access to an established structure of power. Here we see a safer route, departing from constraints in one social arrangement to accommodate bounded constraints in a new social arrangement where

constraint still exists, but does not require exploitation to afford a sense of 'overcoming' in effort to earn autonomy. This is not a pathway of risk and taking chances, but one where social arrangements are operationalised to exploit the status quo, creating a safe 'space' where narratives of *reliability* and *normalcy* are portrayed through accommodating constraint and stigmatisation. Here entrepreneurship is used in a different way. By accommodating constraint a space is created to engage in entrepreneuring within the safe boundaries of the new social system, forging new relationships and arrangements via micro-processes to effect change, which in turn furthers the hardworking 'employee' narrative. Entrepreneuring becomes a narrative tool. Participant 1 describes below how they became employed within an organisation, and benefitted from adopting the established norms of the 'employee' rather than the 'ex-offender' when faced with stigma:

> "there's been negative stuff in work bizarrely, sometimes it's interesting as some people with the best intentions, it's quite patronising, when you tell them I've been inside, you get 'oh look at you in your job!', 'you can write and read!' It doesn't annoy me I just find it quite funny" (P1)

Here participant 1 highlights how rather than challenging or attempting to reduce stigmatisation directly (as in pathway one), they instead accommodate it, attempting to accept the constraint into their lived experience, aiming to portray a sense of normalcy rather than of confrontation and challenge. In doing so they avoid the trap of conforming with an ex-offender stereotype and standing out from the social group, threatening being othered and restricted. Participant 1 continues however to highlight the risk with this strategy, in that protection from stigma and loss of freedom only exists within the adopted social system they manipulated

> "So my conviction is spent next month so I don't have to disclose it, but it would still show up on a DBS, so don't get me wrong I do this for a living so it's my bread and butter so I know more than anyone that employers will discriminate against an ex-offender. I think something like 60-70% of employers openly admit to discriminating against people with convictions. So if I was to get a job now doing pretty much anything else somebody would find out somebody would Google me or somebody would tell someone or I'd bump into someone and you'd be surprised it could have a big knock on effect" (P1)

A strategy of accommodation is employed by participant 7, who describes below how benefiting from the expectations of being an employee also brought surprise exploitative

requests regarding their ex-offender status

> "It was dead hard, I didn't know nothing about it until an hour before when an area manager rung me and said 'where are you? Stop what you are doing you need to meet [CEO]', and I was like 'what for?' He said 'he'll ring you', so I thought I was going to meet [CEO] and I turned up at this school and [CEO] was like 'I hope you don't mind but I just want you to talk for about twenty minutes about you and your life', there were no words to describe it, no words. It was a room of about, there were two sixth form classes so it was about four rows of ten chairs full of girls. They are posh you know, and I'm quite like, when I want to be I can talk like a scally but it's just who I am, but I had to mind my p's and q's" (P7)

Here participant 7 experienced stigma, but rather than raise awareness of their discomfort and feelings of restriction, attempted instead to accommodate the restriction towards their sense of 'employed' self, navigate the social norms of the workplace, and continue the narrative of an employee with agency. Not all external restrictions are experienced as a direct form of stigma however. Participant 3 highlights this when describing how they felt exploited to accept an excessive workload as repayment for being offered employment after prison, reducing their opportunity to entrepreneur

> "But I mean, crazy like crazy ridiculous hours, seven in the morning till one o'clock in the morning I'm still listening to calls and I've been trying to prep. And so that pretty much took me up till just before Christmas… I do love my job is very stressful but at times, as you can see… But I feel like I owe them, so to speak, because the, the opportunity, the backing, you know, and, and again the friendship, you know, couldn't replace that. So half of me goes I still owe you kind of thing. But the other half is kind of, well I've turned down other opportunities as well" (P3)

Across cases within this group we see a repeated pattern of constraining events attributed to external factors, followed by entrepreneuring events. As such by accommodating constraint individuals are able to continue developing a sense of autonomy in spite of existing within a disempowering societal structure. Here the fear of a re-loss of autonomy via the risk of reimprisonment is satiated by aligning with an established structure of power (employer) and accepting its constraining events in exchange for mitigating this fear.

### 4.4 From Passivity to Action (Agency)

Rindova, Barry and Ketchen (2009) explain a key aspect of the emancipatory entrepreneuring process is the enabling of authoring, with individuals attempting to mitigate, outmanoeuvre, or

reorganise detrimental, stigmatizing social systems. We find all our participants attempt to reorganise social systems and do so from common starting points. Common to all participants after release is an experience of stigmatisation producing fear for a loss of freedom alongside a sense of being overwhelmed by a disempowering societal context. These restrictive commonalities persist until a sense of stabilising yet passive events allow participants to feel secure enough to tackle the constraint of stigmatisation, resulting in two distinct pathways. Pathway one exposes the individual to constraint through manifesting constraining events, which are later overcome with entrepreneuring. Here the ready-made narrative of the wily, problem solving, resilient entrepreneur is adopted, capable of addressing threats head on and finding solutions. The result of this authoring strategy is a sense of control over the risk of autonomy loss, continued entrepreneuring, continued constraint reconstruction, and a development of agency. Pathway two attempts to protect the individual from stigma and constraint, doing so by adopting the employee narrative of normalcy, of aligning with the rules and expectations of an existing power structure to create a space within a space, in which stigma can be experienced and accommodated. Here individuals attempt to keep moving forward via a form of entrepreneuring in which opportunities to align with an existing power structure are exploited, in turn accepting its constraining events and mitigating the fear of freedom loss. Through doing so agency is developed, with a sense of overcoming restriction and of mitigating stigma.

## 5 Theorising Pathways

Combining findings and literature we are able to offer causal mechanisms explaining how authoring pathways develop against and within a stigmatising context. Stigma is experienced as negative labelling and stereotyping and is exercised against those who are perceived as incongruent to social values. For those at-risk groups who attract stigma, Goffman (1963) describes them as being ‘socially discredited’, and as such are avoided with expressions of fear, discomfort and discrimination (Winnick and Bodkin, 2008). Stigmatisation acts as a

normalizing process for society by defining what deviance and unacceptable behaviour are. From doing so societal members can maintain predictability and order (Gans, 1995), identifying the 'other' (Smith, 2010). Mechanic and Tanner (2007) argue that stigma has led to segregation by race and class, devaluing high concentrations of people including those with a history of prison, as society deems them as personally responsible for their circumstances, justifying marginalisation and restriction of access to wider social benefits. One way to counter marginalisation stemming from stigma, is through emancipatory entrepreneuring.

Emancipatory entrepreneuring (EE) has been welcomed by policymakers and within literature as a route towards positive societal change. Undertaking EE assumes the overcoming of a constraining influence as part of a progressively linear process, as well as assuming apriori positive outcomes, and that entrepreneuring and emancipation work together. As such EE literature overlooks what enables emancipatory processes, meaning we know little about the strategies employed and the constituent parts, in particular how the enablement of authoring is constructed and enacted requires greater understanding. This is an important omission considering we know EE is undertaken within contexts of constraint and is utilized in rehabilitative practices (Patzelt et al., 2014).

Working with ex-offenders who were entrepreneurs in prison and who have recently gained freedom (autonomy), this study explores the process of authoring to uncover previously unknown stages facilitating overcoming restriction and regaining a sense of ownership over constraint via entrepreneuring. This research discovers how from an initial experience of being granted freedom, individuals enter into a passive experience of stalled yet stabilising actions. Although having undertaken entrepreneuring whilst in prison through various forms of venture development, for all upon release, the entrepreneurial skillset becomes ineffectual. This experience of passivity is underscored by the continued feeling of risk towards autonomy. Individuals are aware that they exist as a marginalised group within a disempowering social structure, a structure which could remove their freedom in the same way it was granted.

For many individuals the consequence of enduring marginalization within a disempowering social structure results in re-offending and reentry to prison. Our participants however undertake two differing pathways, and instead choose to dynamically engage with constraints in attempt to change the position of power in the trading process - from one who is labelled/exploited by others, to one who owns what it means to be an entrepreneurial ex-offender, changing its meaning.

We found that authoring ebbed and flowed through the process, which we explain through two equifinal pathways, inferred as statements of regularity in Figure 3 and conceptualized as causal mechanisms in Table 1.

Within pathway one individuals do not attempt to avoid 'ex-offender stigma', instead they create a new space for themselves as 'ex-offender entrepreneurs'. Within this space the rules are different, constraint is a construct which can be manipulated through action, choosing when and why to enact constraining events in order to support an 'overcoming narrative'. This finding aligns with disclosure research from Harding (2003), Winnick and Bodkin (2008), and Ricciardelli and Mooney (2018) who find ex-offenders exert control over how they are viewed by others through a process of *stigma management*. This is a narrative authored as much for presentation to society as it is a coping strategy for themselves. The overcoming constraint narrative via entrepreneuring enables a rejection of a highly stigmatised identity, that of the ex-offender, and in a similar manner to that found by Adeeko and Treanor (2022) when researching entrepreneurial refugees, "to distance the self from this damaging label that taints all other life experiences" (p.24).

By allowing surmountable constraining events to be manifested within the entrepreneurial space, individuals provide an opportunity to overcome constraint, temporarily reducing the fear of autonomy loss as control over constraint is experienced. This is an iterative process continued throughout this pathway as their venture develops, until such time as the venture takes on the sustaining role of a stable structure of power, containing its own rules, norms and

values to which the individual can align with and experience a sense of reduced risk. This pathway is channelled through self-employment.

Pathway two finds alignment with Stone (2016) in their exploration of redemption narratives, which highlight "the actions or experiences of the teller that emphasize the teller's inherent goodness or normalcy while attributing past deviance to bad circumstances or a corrupting force (e.g. substance use)" (p.963). This is a pathway where constraints are accommodated in aid of maintaining normalcy, where effort is made to align by the rules and expectations of an established structure of power. Rather than attempting to exploit fissures in established structures, individuals attempt to form a cohesive narrative of 'moving forward', displaying reliability/dependability/certainty over time. This is not a pathway of risk and taking chances, but one of appropriating ready-made narratives, behaviours and discourses to competently partake in the social system (Gherardi, 2015). Authoring here is observed through subtle change making activities, restructuring local institutional norms to create a thinly veiled space within a space to allow for autonomy to be actioned, and empowerment to be fostered. This strategy is channelled through employment.

## 6 Discussion

Entrepreneurs are viewed as particularly well positioned to achieve emancipation from oppressive societal norms such as stigmatisation, with their everyday practices viewed as containing small acts of resistance against adversity. Within restricted contexts where rules are dictated and agentic spaces designated, the oppressed must enact authoring, taking control and ownership of their actions theorised through emancipatory entrepreneuring. The emancipatory entrepreneuring process however assumes emancipation takes place upon the static staging of constraint, assumes its removal as part of a progressively linear process, assumes apriori positive outcomes, and also assumes that entrepreneuring and emancipation work together. We consider these criticisms alongside the gap within our understanding of emancipatory entrepreneuring regarding how this process unfolds for those oppressed, in particular how

authoring in effort to obtain agency is achieved. We discover two authoring pathways undertaken from comparable starting points, which although differ in how they address stigmatisation, reach equifinal outcomes of achieving agency.

## 7 Theoretical Contribution

This study advances research on the emancipatory entrepreneuring perspective in the following ways. First, we contribute at a theoretical level to the emancipation framework by providing new conceptual linkages within the authoring dimensions of emancipation, expanding EE theory. As argued by Brattström and Wennberg (2021) often within EE literature the entrepreneur is portrayed as a character who can "act with confidence and superior judgment… challenge the status quo (and, surprisingly often, change it too)" (p.8). They are disrupters, highly motivated and follow liberal individualistic ideals. We show however that this is not always the case. Our study highlights the importance of gaining stability in uncertain contexts and of embracing passivity before attempting action. In this respect the relationship between the individual and the wider context is key in understanding how entrepreneurs engage with non-physical resources to attempt to change their position in the social order. Rather than adopting the established view of venture development leading to increased economic wellbeing which in turn provides access to increased status, our findings show that of equal importance is how individuals engage with restriction at a conceptual level. We highlight how recognising and capitalising upon narratives accepted by society can be a successful way to empower and validate the self in the eyes of the surrounding others. This is a process of becoming, exploiting readymade narratives to transition from a discredited person into an accepted and in some situations esteemed individual, finding empowerment within a disempowering social system. In this manner the strategy of authoring undertaken by the agent in attempt to regain empowerment is shaped by the context, as opposed to the established view within literature of the entrepreneur applying technological novelty or venture capital to shape the context.

Secondly, we highlight how the process of authoring can have common beginnings and

endings yet with divergent pathways which separate in their enactment. EE theory assumes meritocratic, accessible free markets through which to seek empowerment and the overcoming of restriction (Verduijn et al., 2014; Högberg et al., 2016; Ahl and Marlow, 2021). This study reveals however that for those liberated from oppressive contexts, this is not always the end of restriction and the provision of entry into free markets to pursue empowerment. Rather restriction persists and requires considered strategy in order to achieve agency. In this manner we show that entrepreneurship and emancipation do not necessarily work in conjunction, challenging the assumed linear, positive pathway entrepreneurs are thought to undertake.

We also contribute to criminological literature and the concept of recidivism through the 'life-course' theory of desistance from crime. Life-course theory places focus upon 'social bonds', "as the investment in social bonds grows, the incentive for avoiding crime increases because more is at stake. . . Individuals who desist from crime are significantly more likely to have entered into stable marriages and steady employment" (Laub, Nagin and Sampson, 2017, p.225). Our study highlights however that of equal importance is how ex-offenders deal with stigma and the extent to which they recognise the disempowering nature of the social system they have re-entered into. Many of our participants held stable relationships and benifitted from undertaking immediate 'stabilising actions' in gaining employment upon release. However these activities and social bonds did not prevent restriction or provide a strategy to take control of agency by offering an alternative to reoffending and the sense of control (albeit of a deviant nature) afforded. By engaging in entrepreneuring however, ex-offenders were able to manipulate stigma for their own benefit (in pathway one) or adopt narratives of normalcy so as to move past stigmatisation (in pathway two) to gain agency and a sense of legitimate empowerment, reducing the need to commit crime in order to achieve these primary goods. This study therefore makes an important theoretical contribution to desistance theory, highlighting that attention needs to be paid to the pathways ex-offenders (and possibly other at-risk groups who experience continued stigmatising restriction after liberation) undertake in pursuit of a sense of agency, control and empowerment. We show that the same outcomes can

be achieved in different ways, with entrepreneuring employed in both a narrative and embodied sense as a tool to achieve this.

## 8 Advancing research on restorative entrepreneuring

This study advances restorative entrepreneurship by revealing two routes for breaking the self-stigmatising cycle. Through pathway one individuals overcome constraint through manipulating stigmatisation, finding opportunity to exploit entrepreneurial narratives to present a story of overcoming constraint. Here, stigma transitions from a perceptual barrier which binds autonomy, to a social resource which authoring can utilise to further the self. Within pathway two at-risk individuals attempt to accommodate constraints, employing narratives of normalcy to move past stigmatising events, choosing when to take action and when to remain passive in response to the actions of the surrounding others. Should it be of benefit to indulge in an 'ex-offender' narrative, this is done so, but whether actioned or pacified, the individual takes control of constraint. Across both pathways a decoupling of the self and stigma takes place, with individuals understanding the role context plays in applying stigmatisation, affording opportunity to author and reorganise it as a social resource. A consequence of this decoupling is a rehumanising of the self. Where previously the at-risk individual may have considered themselves as 'doomed to deviance' (Maruna, 2001), or as worthy of being othered, through enacting agency, self-worth can increase, validated through feedback from the surrounding others.

Furthermore restorative entrepreneuring identifies the challenge presented by increasing the visibility of the at-risk individual through seeking rehabilitative support, inducing greater awareness and often stigma. Through the authoring pathways identified in this study, this risk is mitigated. Visibility of being 'at-risk' is at first concealed with stabilising activities (seeking employment, securing housing, family relationships) helping to reduce the visibility at one level of vulnerability. Once action is taken however to either accommodate or overcome constraint, a new narrative is begun, one of ownership and of responsibility, signalling to

society members that the individual is capable of upholding the social contract, of abiding by social norms and rules. Both pathways led to agency and to acceptance within a social structure.

## 9 Practical Implications

From a practical perspective this study impacts upon probationary research which utilizes self-employment as a necessary means for income and as a work around to societal stigma preventing access to the employment sector. Prominent in rehabilitation research and practice is the Good Life Model which promotes undertaking activities which pull the participant towards life goals (primary goods) (Fortune, 2018). This perspective has been criticized however as potentially being insufficient to tackle a mindset change from antisocial to prosocial (Wainwright and Muñoz, 2020). This research sheds light on the importance of ex-offenders taking ownership of their actions in order to effect positive change, and how this can be done via both meaningful self-employed and employed occupations.

Finally the sample population presents an opportunity to deliver practical impact back into the population. For many ex-offenders entrepreneurship can serve as a viable and necessary means for sustaining an income to provide for themselves and their family (The Centre for Entrepreneurs, 2016). McDaniel et al. (2021) explains how entrepreneurial training delivered either in prison or immediately upon release "has been shown to effectively promote start-up activity and reduce recidivism" (p.2). As such the results from this research will be able to directly inform the organisations which support entrepreneurial training with ex-offenders and marginalised groups.

## 10 Limitations and future research

As with any small-scale study focussing up richness and depth of data, we recognise limitations, but suggest these also present opportunities for future research. Our study covered a six-month period commencing shortly after release from prison. However the process of overcoming restriction and living with stigmatisation persists beyond the scope of this study,

suggesting the possibility for further authoring pathways which may divert and reconnect in a similar manner as those we have discovered, or may branch into alternative strategies as entrepreneuring develops. It would be of great benefit to explore the mid to later stages of re-entry into society potentially discovering pathways which, if implemented earlier, with hindsight could produce positive impacts upon recidivism. This study focussed upon the at-risk group of ex-offenders as a means to focus in upon the process of authoring where freedom has been granted, isolating the authoring process to such a stage of liberation. However other contexts where autonomy has been previously removed also exists (under tyranny, slavery) and offer potential future contexts to explore the application of entrepreneuring as a pathway producing empowerment tool. Through observing entrepreneuring within these contexts we can discover the generalisability of such a pathway theory as has been developed here, including the relationship dynamics between restrictive contexts and the individual.

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# Chapter Five - Conclusion

*It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.*

- Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela

## 1. Peters story

Peter suffered a wealth of detrimental, oppressive, degrading and at times violent experiences whilst inside prison. From his initial incarceration and 'settling in' period through to release, the experience of constraint remained dynamic and ever present. Speaking to Peter now, as he describes himself, is not however an experience of speaking with an 'ex-offender'. He does not lead with stories of violence, of being kept locked inside his cell for days at a time during the Covid-19 pandemic, of his food being taken from him by other inmates, or of being humiliated by prison officials. Instead he speaks of what the next step of his book publishing company is; what his five-year goals are; the outcome of his most recent business loan application and how he is in the early stages of bringing on board a new business partner. He reflects back upon his time spent in prison not as an ex-offender, but as an entrepreneur. This perspective contextualises his experience in prison, as he describes here when discussing why he continues to develop his business:

> "It's because I know it works. It's like I suppose in a way, of everything I've been through in life - before prison, after prison - It's for me to build a legacy if you like, for, whether it's my son, whether it's the rest of my family to go 'Yeah, well done'. And it's not a pat on my back, so to speak. It's like, my life wasn't a waste of time. Yeah, I think that's probably it in a nutshell. It's 'what have you done with your life?' and there's many a great experience I've had and many bad experiences. This one is more pure, if you like, and say, if it, if people buy into the passion, like I do, even a small part of it, hopefully it will give them something. So, I'm a bit of a dreamer I think"

Setting Peter apart from other entrepreneurs however is the nature and context of his start-up story. For many entrepreneurs their start-up story may begin with access to family capital, with being safely employed and intrapreneuring outwards, or from a business course at a local collage. Peter's entrepreneurial journey began during the most oppressive and restrictive period

of his life, where not only capital, network and resources were removed, but his autonomy and agency were stripped away. Peter reflects here upon how prison has impacted on how he approaches his business:

> "I think, seeing the depths of despair, and looking at some unfortunate people around you, in a place like that, that they weren't as lucky as me. As in, maybe support, maybe they don't have the, not the IQ I don't mean it like that, but maybe they don't have the skills to get out in front of everyone… For me, personally, mentally, I think I look back and I go "Yeah, that was tough. So if you can get through that you should be able to get through anything. And you should grab…" and this is part of the reason why I'm still passionate about [my business] because of that situation where you go "You, you are going to achieve this, it doesn't matter all your haters, all your hangers on, you are going to achieve something" and that's part of the drive. So, yeah, I'm grateful for it. I regret it, don't get me wrong. But I'm grateful for it at the same time because I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now"

Despite this we know that restrictions persisted for Peter after being released from prison, kept aflame by internal negative perceptions which were externally enforced within a disempowering societal structure. Despite even this however, Peter continued to develop his business, to entrepreneur, and has done so to the extent that he no longer feels his experience inside prison was wasted time, but instead one which afforded him the opportunity to spark his business idea and the motivation to grow it, achieving a sense of emancipation.

How do we explain Peter's story? Established within literature is the theory of emancipatory entrepreneuring (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009) which attempts to explain the phenomenon of oppressed people apparently overcoming restriction via entrepreneuring. Until now however the processes taking place which brought about such a dramatic change in the lived experience remained largely unexplored and unknown, with assumptions of linearity and wealth accrual employed to fill in the gaps. Through the lens of the papers comprising this thesis, we can now gain an understanding of the processes Peter and other individuals enduring severe restriction may undertake in not just entrepreneuring, but in what antecedes entrepreneuring to allow for emancipatory change to occur. A process requiring complex interactions across several layers and dimensions to be impactful; a process requiring helping others and of giving out before gaining back; of exploiting cracks and fractures in oppressive

structures; of alternative authoring pathways which although have common beginnings can diverge widely and yet achieve a common ending to gain empowerment.

Summarised together, the results of this thesis shine a light into the *black box* of what occurs before and during emancipatory entrepreneuring, giving much greater depth and richness to understand the experiences Peter and others went through to gain their sense of emancipation.

## 2 Reflection of What Drove This Dissertation

The proposal that via entrepreneurship individuals and communities will not only transform local regions but also the lives of those creating them, although fairly common within literature, is also heavily criticised. There are few empirical studies regarding the assumed emancipatory outcome of entrepreneurship (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016); there are doubts regarding its ability to actually change the status quo of oppressive contexts (Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Verduijn et al., 2014); it carries too much promise for a 'happy ending' and a redemptive outcome overstating it's ability for societal transformation (Blackburn and Ram, 2006), and finally, as succinctly put by Tedmanson et al., (2015), to claim enterprises can "generate pristine new spaces of absolute autonomy outside of what Jacques Camatte calls the "despotism of capital" seems a form of denial of the evidence that emancipation is often only a fleeting moment, enclosed or neutralized by the expansive force of the capitalist project" (p.3).

And yet, despite this, there are those living within contexts of constraint who feel a very real sense of being oppressed, of having their freedom and chances to effect change for themselves removed, and for whom entrepreneuring provided a real sense of liberation (Mair and Marti, 2009; Al-Dajani et al., 2015; Chandra, 2017; Heilbrunn, 2019). Further, from a practitioner perspective entrepreneuring is applied across the UK, and in many other countries, as a pro-social rehabilitative and reintegrative process for those at-risk of discrimination, marginalisation, poverty and stigmatisation (Chandra, 2017; Sabella and El-Far, 2019). Such

a contrast between theory and practice prompted this research project into exploring the application of entrepreneurship within challenging contexts, attempting to answer the central question of how does emancipatory entrepreneurship provide a transitory route for at-risk societal groups to improve their life circumstances?

In order to answer this question three further questions were unveiled. Firstly from reviewing entrepreneurship literature at the intersection of challenging contexts and at-risk groups, there was found to be a lack of interdisciplinary literature integrating the practitioner perspective of working with at-risk groups and entrepreneuring. Namely within the areas of rehabilitative and reintegrative research. As such this risked tackling our central question from only one side of the phenomena, neglecting the incorporation of both agentic and structural components. This prompted a need to first investigate how practitioners working with the rehabilitation of at-risk groups deal and engage with emancipatory entrepreneuring, exploring what the long-standing challenges facing service providers are.

Through undertaking a form of citizen science (Irwin, 1995) and hosting focus group sessions with 11 service providers who work with at-risk groups to provide an entrepreneuring role, we uncovered a messy, complex multi-layered collection of challenges which constrains both the scope of service delivery and the role entrepreneuring can play. When held against emancipatory entrepreneuring we noted little is offered to tackle the interconnected embedded nature of rehabilitation within a disempowering societal context. We argued therefore for a systematic mapping of areas of inquiry and development, and a new research framework which we assert is found with restorative entrepreneuring - a set of entrepreneurial practices and a system of support which enables individuals at-risk to reconstruct their sense of ownership and self-worth and engage in a progressively autonomous rehabilitative life project, away from deviant behavior and out of detrimental and stigmatizing circumstances. Through taking this approach and recognising the shortcomings of emancipatory entrepreneuring, we offer a way forward for the role of entrepreneuring to create a positive life change for those at-risk within

society. Restorative entrepreneuring focusses upon 4 central components which in turn are comprised of 16 dimensions, the construction of autonomy, developing a sense of ownership, developing a sense of self-worth and the construction of a replacement self. We discovered that while each of these dimensions can by themselves enable emancipatory entrepreneuring, we observe that they tend to act in conjunction, reinforcing each other, supporting individuals to break from the past as they overcome constraints and detrimental circumstances. From this research it became clear that further exploration of the emancipatory entrepreneuring perspective, as a component of the wider restorative entrepreneuring framework, was required – critiquing a space within a space.

Through considering the need to gain autonomy as a first step towards emancipation (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009), we formed our second question, in seeking to understand what preceded the process of emancipatory entrepreneuring, or put another way, how does one gain autonomy? And further, how does the messy context impact upon this?

Our second paper therefore sought to explore the origins of autonomy and the interaction between the individual and context. In order to achieve this we required a highly niche and rare sample population who had experienced having their autonomy removed yet had continued to undertake entrepreneuring. We chose ex-offenders who had begun entrepreneuring whilst incarcerated in the UK prison system. The prison system presented a unique context from which to consider developing autonomy, as just displaying the intention to gain autonomy can be detrimental and potentially lead to punishment. Leveraging life story research (Leung, 2010; Kevill et al., 2015) alongside co-created timelines with eleven participants, we gained rich detailed data by reconstructing their experiences from the moment they were incarcerated to their release, focusing on the circumstances, actions and events identified by them as central to their emancipatory journey. Applying process tracing methods (Muñoz, Cacciotti and Cohen, 2018; Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte, 2019), we found that participants actively 'work' apparently fixed constraints by first 'exploring constraints' and then 'expanding constraints',

with six constituent parts, preceded by all inmates with an acknowledgement of incarceration trauma. Our findings highlighted the importance of time as a dimension of emancipation, showing how participants experience a resetting stage after the initial trauma of entering prison, creating a 'temporal landmark' with their prior life ending, and a new imprisoned life commencing. We found it was from this landmark a process of expansion and retraction in response to a dynamically constraining context afforded opportunity to exert small acts of control through helping others, eventually accruing to an expansion of the opportunity-action space. Crucially, we show how entrepreneuring requires more to provide a route towards emancipation than what is currently discussed within literature, discovering how autonomy can be constructed under extreme constraints.

Finally, the advancement of the restorative entrepreneuring framework highlighted the central role stigmatisation plays as at-risk groups strive to entrepreneur within disempowering societal systems. In such restricted contexts where rules are dictated and agentic spaces designated, the oppressed must enact authoring practices, taking control and ownership of their actions in pursuit of agency, as opposed to society interpreting their behaviour and actions through the lens of detrimental stereotypes. For those oppressed, how this authoring process through entrepreneuring unfolds however is largely unknown, and yet entrepreneuring is used as a rehabilitative process for marginalised groups.

This realization produced our final question, which asks how at-risk groups overcome difficult and restricting life circumstances in attempt at taking ownership of the emancipatory process via authoring. To answer this question we examined the narratives of our 11 participants after they were released from prison. This sample population and context provided an especially interesting research opportunity, as despite being free, their freedom was not earned through entrepreneuring, it was granted to them, detaching somewhat the process of authoring from autonomy via entrepreneuring for examination. Further it is widely researched that ex-offenders endure stigmatisation within society (Bain and Parkinson, 2010; Kirkwood

and McNeill, 2015; Ricciardelli and Mooney, 2018), presenting an opportunity to investigate how these entrepreneurs took ownership of their narratives and actions within an actively disempowering societal context in pursuit of agency.

Using a process-tracing methodology (Muñoz, Cacciotti and Cohen, 2018; Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte, 2019) coding and analysing key events across this stage of participant narratives, we produced a unique authoring process comprised of two pathways with common beginnings and endings, undertaken in response to a dynamically disempowering societal context. Pathway one sees individuals reconstruct and overcome constraint via entrepreneuring, pathway two, in contrast, sees individuals attempt to accommodate constraint via adopting 'ready-made' narratives of normalcy and entrepreneuring. The results of this study highlight how the process of authoring via entrepreneuring is not a one size fits all process; we show how the power of the 'entrepreneurial narrative' carries only so much weight in offsetting negative stereotyping and as such is not a 'magic bullet' in overcoming oppression. Rather much more strategy and navigation of disempowering societal norms and rules is required through the employment of entrepreneurial narratives. Equally the accrual of wealth through entrepreneuring as an attempt at improving economic wellbeing, factors very little in our findings, suggesting status and empowerment is not achieved through financial gain or micro-finance for those at-risk, but more so through the validation of the surrounding others.

## 3 Theoretical Contributions

This thesis makes important contributions to both entrepreneurship and rehabilitative research. The following section will discuss each papers contribution to theory on its own merits, then collectively as one thesis.

### 3.1 Independent Contributions

Paper one: Restorative Entrepreneuring: A New Framework for the Study of Entrepreneurship and Emancipation in At-Risk Social Groups

Through the development of restorative entrepreneuring this paper addresses the theoretical gap in emancipatory entrepreneurship literature concerning the dynamic relationship between the at-risk individual (mindset, skills, decisions and actions), their systems of support, including families and support organizations, and the context of their constraint more broadly. As such, restorative entrepreneuring offers a much broader view of emancipatory work, recognising the practice of entrepreneuring as a rehabilitative process as rough, uneven and containing many unanticipated long-standing challenges.

By reviewing rehabilitative literature we introduce the core elements of avoiding deviant behavior and restructuring one's mindset in pursuit of personal goals, allowing restorative entrepreneuring to expand and add further specificity around the needs of at-risk social groups beyond the emphasis of emancipatory entrepreneuring and the removal of constraints. Additionally with the development of a new entrepreneurial framework, this paper introduces to the literature a set of entrepreneurial dimensions which facilitate a reconstruction of identity, sense of ownership and self-worth and the engagement in a progressively autonomous rehabilitative life project, which in their application, help to not only overcome constraint, but to embed the at-risk individual back into society and the highly contextual web of social mechanisms where entrepreneuring can take place. However from broadening out the theory of emancipatory entrepreneuring with restorative entrepreneuring, our second and third papers add much more granularity and fine detail.

Paper two: Entrepreneurship, Emancipation and The Construction of Autonomy Under Extreme Constraints

In attempt at discovering what antecedes the process of emancipatory entrepreneuring and the impact of context, our second paper reveals the process of autonomy construction, highlighting how autonomy can originate in highly restrictive contexts. This paper contributes to emancipatory theory by describing how oppressed individuals can work a constraining

context through expanding the perception for action, which we term the opportunity-action space, required before entrepreneurial actions can materialize. By reacting to constraint and undertaking helping actions in an ad hoc manner, we show how developing autonomy is a dynamic process which capitalizes upon constraint's fluid nature of non-fixed boundaries, with the opportunity-action space emerging between the constraining dynamics of prison and the emancipatory entrepreneuring process, constructed and maintained by the individual.

Finally this paper responds to what Williams et al., (2020) refer to when considering emancipatory entrepreneuring perspectives as reductive in nature which, although valid in their own contexts, struggle to bridge the macro and micro perspectives, producing "a notable gap; a lack of conceptual focus on emancipation and if or to what extent it is subjectively experienced by entrepreneurs" (p.6). This research reveals that the construction of autonomy as experienced by the individual is not done so in an individualistic sense which seeks independence from 'surrounding others' through pursuing self-reliance and self-sufficiency (Anderson and Honneth, 2005). Instead we reveal that through helping actions, individuals engage with their surrounding others to receive recognition and acknowledgement for these actions as part of an ongoing interpersonal process, with the individual's sense of autonomy emerging from encounters with others, and the other's perspectives towards themselves (Anderson and Honneth, 2005). In doing so we observe an epistemological shift in comprehending constraint as autonomy develops, whereby overcoming constraint is conceived as an internal process as the self dissociates from the constraining context.

Paper three: Entrepreneuring, Emancipation and Pathways to Agency: A Study of Entrepreneurial Experiences After Prison

By exploring how at-risk groups overcome difficult and restricting life circumstances through authoring, this paper makes several advances to entrepreneurship and emancipatory entrepreneurship theory. Firstly within emancipatory entrepreneuring literature it is assumed

that would be entrepreneurs have access to meritocratic free markets through which to seek empowerment and to change the status quo (Verduijn, 2015; Högberg et al., 2016; Ahl and Marlow, 2021). This paper reveals however that for some who enter into apparent liberation, a dragging of past restriction occurs. Despite overcoming prior restriction, certain groups, such as ex-offenders, are deemed by society to warrant continued distrust and stigmatisation, restricting access to resources and opportunities which would otherwise facilitate empowerment. In attempt at overcoming this continued constraint, a strategic process new to emancipatory entrepreneurship literature and theory is undertaken, that of authoring pathways.

This paper reveals two authoring pathways employed by entrepreneurs to not only overcome constraint, but to turn it into a resource, each with a common beginning and ending. Pathway one finds opportunity to exploit established entrepreneurial narratives. The everyday experience of stigmatisation is transformed from a perceptual barrier which binds autonomy, into a social resource, moulded into success stories of overcoming. Revealed in this way, we challenge the established view within emancipatory entrepreneurship theory of at-risk groups progressing linearly through the three stages of achieving autonomy, enabling authoring and making declarations, by showing a much more considered, non-linear process. Here the heroic entrepreneurial narrative is reconceived, as societal exclusionary rules are identified and recombined, turned back towards society as obstacles faced and overcome, gaining empowerment and a sense of control. Within pathway two at-risk individuals attempt to accommodate constraints, employing narratives of normalcy to move past stigmatising events, finding control by choosing when to take action and when to remain passive in response to the actions of the surrounding others.

Across both pathways we observe a decoupling of the self from the application of stigma, rehumanising the self and affording the development of self-worth. This is a process of becoming, exploiting readymade narratives to transition from a discredited person into an accepted and in some situations esteemed individual, finding empowerment within a

disempowering social system. This study contributes overall to the theory of emancipatory entrepreneuring by adding much more detail to authoring as a process, revealing how the strategy of authoring undertaken by the agent in attempt to regain empowerment is shaped by the context, as opposed to the established view within literature of the entrepreneur shaping the context.

### 3.2 Collective Contribution to Theory

The question which inspired this thesis - How does emancipatory entrepreneurship provide a transitory route for at-risk societal groups to improve their life circumstances? - required extending the theoretical parameters beyond entrepreneurship and even emancipatory entrepreneurship theory.

By recognising the embeddedness of the emancipatory process within a complex multi-institutional and multi-interpersonal network, this thesis is able to broaden out the relatively constrained emancipatory entrepreneuring literature which largely maintains an institutionalised line of thinking, focussed upon improving economic wellbeing (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011), paying too much attention to entrepreneurial dynamics in a restrictive theoretical vacuum, disregarding the complexity of social problems (Muñoz and Kimmitt, 2018) and the influence of broader life circumstances (Kimmitt, Muñoz and Newbery, 2019). As such it can be argued that entrepreneurial research has become myopic and 'siloed' by this view, cutting off the opportunity for much needed interdisciplinary work to advance social impact opportunities beyond social entrepreneurship. In answer to this, this thesis develops and expands entrepreneurship theory by bringing together the sociological context of at-risk individuals and the rehabilitative processes prominent in criminological research. By doing so we advance both literatures, demonstrating how a socially embedded process can produce micro-manifestations of emancipatory change at the agentic level. Here we challenge the accepted view within emancipatory entrepreneuring literature which holds autonomy and the pathway to emancipation emerge from entrepreneuring. We argue that much more needs to

occur before the emergence of autonomy, and before entrepreneuring can commence.

### 3.3 Contribution to social issues

Grand Societal Challenges including poverty, climate change, water scarcity, inequality and global pandemics present critical problems requiring solutions from governmental policy development to on the ground practitioner implementation. Presented as complex, long standing, multi-layered and reaching across geographic, political and economic boundaries, such social issues present extreme challenges for all of society. Although this thesis cannot claim to solve any of these issues in totality, it does offer significant contributions to how the most marginalised can be reintegrated into society under the right conditions. Here there is opportunity to reconsider how inequality is addressed within society. Through the employment of authoring pathways this research highlights one method for regaining control and empowerment over a controlling disempowering context. As stated by Tedmanson et al., (2015) "social transformation can often begin with a simple refusal to perceive oneself in terms of the hegemonic categories of a capital-centric ideology" (p.4). We find congruence here with our participants all of whom recognised and identified the attempts made to categorise them into stereotypes, and yet resisted through micro acts of change. This change occurred at the perceptual level for individuals, suggesting the need to work with those at-risk in a manner beyond providing finance and resources. As argued by Shane (2009) the solution to social issues is rarely found by promoting more start-ups, or by encouraging more people to be entrepreneurs. Instead this research posits we should be encouraging more entrepreneuring as a tool to support the epistemological shift needed to perceive oneself as separate to a disempowering context.

### 3.4 Contributions to Practice

The development of restorative entrepreneuring can be a legitimate and potentially powerful mechanism for service providers and the at-risk groups they support in tackling the challenges they face. Through the development of restorative entrepreneuring, this thesis offers a cross-

disciplinary, practice-based research agenda to support at-risk social groups, composed of four key dimensions for emancipatory entrepreneuring (EE): 1. At-risk individuals engaged in EE, 2. The EE rehabilitation process, 3. Facilitation of EE rehabilitation process and 4. The institutional setting. Unpacking these dimensions we describe 16 enablers of emancipatory entrepreneuring and the challenges they respond to within the rehabilitative ecosystem. Each of these enablers holds potential to contribute towards practitioner strategy, helping to e.g. break self-stigmatising cycles or to rehumanize individuals. It offers a systematized view of the daily challenges faced by practitioners, as it considers the realities of both at-risk individuals and the support infrastructure facilitating a restorative entrepreneuring process, as well as the broader social and political context. By incorporating the restorative entrepreneuring framework, practitioners can help to break the reinforcing detrimental impact of wider societal challenges facing at-risk groups, rather than placing focus solely upon singular issues such as housing or employment.

Reflecting upon the impact for practitioners working with ex-offenders, this research offers up a potentially important new offender rehabilitation approach through entrepreneuring. The Good Life Model, which encourages engagement in activities that push the participant towards life objectives (primary goods), is well established in rehabilitation research and practice (Fortune, 2018). Research has shown however that for many inmates there is distrust in the ability of prison staff to support their rehabilitation (The Centre for Entrepreneurs, 2016), leading to criticism of this perspective as possibly being insufficient to address a mindset shift from antisocial to prosocial (Wainwright and Muñoz, 2020). As well as developing entrepreneurial assets whilst in prison, the undertaking of entrepreneuring however for some inmates can produce pro-social outcomes beyond the apparent necessity for self-employment as a means to survive after prison. This research overall sheds light on the importance of ex-offenders taking ownership of their actions in order to effect positive change, and how this can be done via both meaningful self-employed and employed occupations.

Finally many organisations such as ‘Timpson Ltd’ and ‘Halfords Plc’ in the UK, have successfully established offender recruitment programs, working within prisons to develop entrepreneurial skills, in turn creating a new sense of identity and purpose outside of illegitimate activities. The findings from this research can be delivered back into these in-prison programmes to impact upon selection criteria and taught curriculum. Whilst it might be sought to progress all prisoners through some form of entrepreneurship training, this research highlights how individuals need to first progress through a reflective resetting period, coming to their own decision to reject maladaptive prison coping strategies to allow for the entrepreneurial process to commence. Equally, whilst most traditional entrepreneurship training programmes place emphasis upon developing financial acuity, business formation or idea development, from a reintegrative and rehabilitative perspective, this research highlights the importance of facilitating helping actions as a means to develop a sense of personal control over both the self and the perceived context. As such the results from this research will be able to directly inform the organisations which support entrepreneurial training with ex-offenders and marginalised groups.

**4. Limitations and Future Research**

This thesis benefited from the rich contextual data collected to garner a deep understanding of the emancipatory / oppressive phenomenon. Naturally however such highly qualitative data entails limitations in regards to its scope. The unique requirements of the sample population (to have become entrepreneurial whilst inside prison, to have been released fairly recently and to have continued to entrepreneur), organically restricted the sample population size. This presents both limitations and opportunities for future research. The small-scale sample population and their narratives present as specific to their social and cultural contexts, generalization to other contexts therefore (e.g. contexts of enslavement or tyranny) would require careful consideration. There is real opportunity however to investigate the process of entrepreneuring whilst under conditions of such restriction. For example we do not understand

how entrepreneurs who exist in contexts where making declarations to challenge the status quo which results in imprisonment or severe repercussion (such as soviet / communist states) are able to practice entrepreneuring to affect change. Such research would help to broaden out theory beyond the restricted literature space of economic development or poverty alleviation.

The ex-offenders who took part in this research project did so shortly after release from prison in effort to reduce memory loss. However as with any life narrative data collection two considerations are introduced, the possible impact of recall bias, with data conflated or misremembered in its description, and secondly the possibility of data being recalled to present a particular 'positive representation'. The combined use of co-created timelines employed within the second paper of this thesis, help to mitigate these effects somewhat, however even here the data collected is subjective to the participants recollection. Further research exploring the process of emancipation via entrepreneuring which employs timelines alongside participant diary methods perhaps, collecting data in the present rather than retrospectively, would help to mitigate these limitations further and would offer a rich data source.

Finally ex-offender participant data collection took place across three months for each participant in the form of a longitudinal research design. In doing so we were able to capture the present accounts of entrepreneuring within context, as well as future data with three month goals. However the process of overcoming constraints for at-risk groups enduring stigmatisation is often a lifelong process requiring constant vigilance to navigate effectively and prevent marginalisation - beyond the scope of this thesis. Future research however combing multiple data sources which can span greater longitudinal timelines, perhaps incorporating other 'non-linear' data collection methods which can help order a lifetime of overcoming and becoming, would add much needed wider generalisability to the literature.

## 5 Conclusion

Through exploring the process of emancipatory entrepreneuring this thesis has uncovered new understandings for how the most vulnerable and marginalised in society can make substantial

change to their lived experience. The doing of entrepreneurship has been shown to produce pro-social outcomes without focus placed upon economic gain. Instead focus is placed upon the interconnected and inter-personal nature of entrepreneuring as a context specific process. Through its enactment those at-risk can find a pathway back into mainstream society, but more so can find a means to develop self-worth, self-trust and self-esteem. In seeking emancipation this thesis highlights that this is not an individualistic process, shunning support from others in attempt to live a life of freedom. Rather it is via social, communal, and engaged action that at-risk populations, who have had their voices restricted or removed from the social reality around them, can express their voices and declare their intentions. I hope this research inspires further interest in the unobserved entrepreneurial actions undertaken everyday in pursuit of a more equal society.

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## Chapter Six – Acknowledgements

This PhD research project would not have been feasible without the financial support provided by the Economic Social and Research Council (ESRC), for which I am extremely grateful to be the recipient of a full scholarship. Additionally the institutional support provided by the University of Liverpool Management School, in both its administrative and academic aspects has been instrumental in making this research possible.

The professional ambition of undertaking a PhD was supported into reality through the ongoing inspirational support provided by my two supervisors, Prof Dilani Jayawarna and Prof Pablo Munoz. Prof Jayawarna's initial conversations discussing the implications and expectations of a PhD held before this research commenced, were instrumental in dispelling the myths and uncertainties which held back even the consideration of undertaking a PhD. The ongoing academic support along with her expertise of the procedural nature of the PhD have been exceptional.

The guidance, academic insight, professional council and pastoral support provided by Prof Muñoz have been outstanding, and have frequently involved going beyond what would be expected of a supervisor's duties. Through Prof Muñoz's support this PhD has been able to provide research which not only makes significant contribution towards entrepreneurial theory, but carries important impact for practitioners working with at-risk populations. A direct consequence of Prof Muñoz's support has been not only the completion of this research project within three years, but the opening up of a direct route towards future research and career opportunities, for which I am eternally grateful.

The participants and gatekeepers who took part in this research entrusted the safe keeping and respect of their stories to this PhD. Without their involvement this research would not have been possible and I am grateful for being given the opportunity to convey their stories in a manner which hopefully not only contributes towards our understanding of marginalised groups, but which also conveys their voice.

On a personal note, for the unending belief in my abilities, the ever-present ear to listen to my frustrations and challenges, and for the continuous love and support needed to make undertaking a PhD research project possible, I am forever grateful to my wife Louisa. Without the sacrifices she has made to endure a husband becoming a student again, this research would have stalled and stumbled to a halt before it could begin. Louisa's unwavering belief in my ability to build a career from a PhD was the engine which kept it moving forward when finances became tight and sacrifices were made - becoming even more pivotal with the arrival of our son Cillian half way through the last year of the PhD.

The encouragement and frequent requests for research updates made by my mother and family have provided much needed opportunities to discuss my writing - and to find explanations of concepts in accessible terms and language! The ever present and ever growing sense of pride displayed by my mother as this project grew and developed has been a constant source of motivation, I hope it makes her prouder still in its completion.

Finally, a special mention to Frank, Bruce and Luna, who's need for petting, walking and playing never faltered, and provided the necessary opportunity for escapism whenever the page remained blank.