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ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A NARRATIVES

PRZEDSIĘBIORCZOŚĆ JAKO NARRACJE

Abstract: Research on entrepreneurship is developed, however, it seems that there are still many cognitive gaps especially in the perspectives of humanistic and discursive approach. The paper addresses the topic of innovation entrepreneurship in the context of the significance of narratives, knowledge constructivism and design of business stories. Descriptively, the role of narrative in the creation and development of business is presented using Apple and Theranos as examples. The research methodology was based on literature and documentation analysis and a qualitative approach which involves case analysis and exploration, and through inductive reasoning.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, narratives, Steve Jobs, Elizabeth Holmes, management

Streszczenie: Badania nad przedsiębiorczością są dobrze ugruntowane, jednak wydaje się, że nadal istnieje wiele luk poznawczych zwłaszcza w perspektywie podejścia humanistycznego i dyskursywnego. Artykuł podejmuje temat przedsiębiorczości innowacyjnej w kontekście znaczenia narracji, konstruktywizmu wiedzy oraz projektowania opowieści biznesowych. W sposób deskryptywny zaprezentowano rolę narracji w budowie oraz rozwoju organizacji na przykładzie firmy Apple oraz firmy Theranos. Metodologia badawcza opierała się na analizie literatury i dokumentacji oraz podejściu jakościowym związanym z analizą i eksploracją przypadków w oparciu o rozumowanie indukcyjne.

Słowa kluczowe: przedsiębiorczość, narracje, Steve Jobs, Elizabeth Holmes, zarządzanie

Introduction

One of the developing research approaches in management science and organization studies is narrative methods also known as narrative research[1] or discursive approach[2]. The issue of storytelling or narrative as an element of the social world of business and entrepreneurship is strongly linked to meta approaches to the status of knowledge. Such a basic meta cognitive perspective related to the origin of our knowledge about the world is the problem of knowledge constructivism. Constructivism recognizes that we create representations of reality by means of cognitive functions independent of our experience. Thus, this concept is derived from Kantian epistemology, allowing a priori cognition before experience[3]. The popularity of the constructivist knowledge in recent times can be associated with

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[1] P. Pachura, *Metody narracyjne w naukach o zarządzaniu – przykład badań nad przedsiębiorczością lokalną*, [in:] P. Pachura (ed.), *Storytelling w badaniach firm rodzinnych*, Wydawnictwo Wydziału Zarządzania Politechniki Częstochowskiej, Częstochowa 2015, pp. 19-25.

[2] E. Vaara, J. Tienar, *A discursive perspective on legitimation strategies in multinational corporations*, "Academy of Management Review" 2008, No. 33, pp. 985-993; D.M. Boje, C. Oswick, J.D. Ford, *Language and Organization: The Doing of Discourse,* "Academy of Management Review" 2004, No. 29, pp. 571-577.

[3] M. Czarnocka, *Podmiotowość według Kanta. Filozofia i nauka,* "Studia Filozoficzne i Interdyscyplinarne" 2014, No. 2; P. Pachura, *Kantian and post-Kantian thought as an illustration of an ideational foundations of European integration*, "Folia Geographica" 2018, No. 60/2, pp. 5-14.

the development of epistemological optics based on cognitivist assumptions, also derived from the sociology of knowledge. This fact can be confirmed, for example, by the great career of such concepts as social capital or intellectual capital.

The main assumption of constructivism is the belief that knowledge about the world, including scientific knowledge and cognition, is determined by culture and others social factors. Thus, knowledge is, so to speak, "constructed" by people rather than discovered. In narrative research contexts, we are just faced with the construction of the world through narratives, and we have to decode it, or interpret[4]. The problem of constructivism of knowledge itself is a rather broad and multifaceted, taken up by many scientific schools[5]. As Cichobłazinski notes, "an organization... is not only an efficient mechanism aiming at continuous improvement of its efficiency – as, it is in conventional organization theory – it is, first of all, a network of activities whose product is symbols. This is why myths, rituals, legends are so important in organizations"[6]. Within this cognitive framework, it can be considered that narratives are processes of creating reality that are relational in form. That are stories, representing a storyline or idea in interaction with particular cultural contexts[7]. "Some narratives are even archetypal and their use greatly shortens the process of communication: for example, the story of Achilles' heel, David and Goliath, Prometheus, etc. These narratives create a kind of semiotic space, and their unfamiliarity excludes them from the community of meanings"[8].

Narrative research in entrepreneurship – literature review

One can notice the increasing importance of narrative research in entrepreneurship studies, this is related to a growing appreciation of qualitative research[9]. Nordqvist et al. reflects on the peculiar production of stories on entrepreneurship starting from the classic "creative destruction" position of P. Schumpeter[10]. Within the

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[4] A.C. Discua, E. Hamilton, S. Jacka, *Understanding entrepreneurial opportunities through metaphors: a narrative approach to theorizing family entrepreneurship*, "Entrepreneurship & Regional Development An International Journal" 2021, No. 33, pp. 5-6.

[5] See: J. Habermas, *Teoria działania komunikacyjnego*, PWN, Warszawa 1999; E. Glasersfeld, *An introduction to radical constructivism*, [in:] P. Watzlawick (ed.), *The invented reality*, Norton, New York 1984; H.A. Simon, *The sciences of the artificial*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1969.

[6] L. Cichobłaziński, *Podejście narracyjne w teorii organizacji: innowacja, zmiana, konflikt,* [in:] P. Pachura (ed.), *Storytelling w badaniach firm rodzinnych*, Wydawnictwo Wydziału Zarządzania Politechniki Częstochowskiej, Częstochowa 2015, p. 9.

[7] B. Czarniawska, *Writing Management: Organization Theory as a Literary Genre*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999.

[8] L. Cichobłaziński, *Podejście narracyjne…*, p. 12.

[9] M. Marzec, *Telling the corporate story: vision into action*, "Journal of Business Strategy" 2007, No. 28, pp. 26-36.

[10] M. Nordqvist, B. Kjellander, F. Welter, *The Novelist as Entrepreneur, the Novel as Entrepreneurship,* "Jönköping International Business School Working Papers" 2010, No. 2010-10, pp. 1-28.

narrative research of entrepreneurship, Johansson distinguishes the areas of study as: constructing entrepreneurial Identities, learning entrepreneurship, and (re)conceptualizing entrepreneurship[11]. Dey and Steyaert draw attention to the distinction between grand narratives of entrepreneurship and small narratives[12]. In this case, small narratives also have the importance of discovering or creating new territories, spaces for stories. Stories about business ventures are one of the most carrying motifs of contemporary legends, myths or simply stories of success, failure or persistence. Fletcher points out the migration or proliferation of particular stories in different cultural contexts[13]. At the same time, the importance of entrepreneurial stories is also the importance of developing the motivation to undertake one's own business activities due to the encouragement of entrepreneurial success stories. Entrepreneurship stories seem to spread based on general, enduring cultural codes associated with the power of particular cultures especially the liberal "western" culture.

Smith and Anderson claim "that there is a primary relationship between storytelling and entrepreneurship because the communication of value is obviously central to the practice of entrepreneurship, because the entrepreneur 'takes between' creating and extracting the value of their product or service"[14]. As O'Connor noted "before a company exists, it is a story about an imagined future"[15]. An interesting strand of narrative research is family entrepreneurship, here we find a system of stories about family business passed down through generations. Cruz et al. study family businesses in Honduras focusing on studies of the importance of stories and entrepreneurial metaphors in the transmission of the family entrepreneurial ethos[16]. By examining metaphors relating to entrepreneurial practices developed and repeated within the family, one can arrive at an understanding of family entrepreneurship as a social and discursive process in which meanings and values are transmitted and maintained in interactions.

Branstad adopts a collective perspective rather than a classically individualistic one in narrative research on entrepreneurship[17]. Contrary to popular notions that

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[11] A.W. Johansson, *Narrating the Entrepreneur*, "International Small Business Journal" 2004, No. 22/3, pp. 273-293.

[12] P. Dey, C. Steyaert, *The politics of narrating social entrepreneurship*, "Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy" 2010, No. 4/1, pp. 85-108.

[13] D. Fletcher, *'Toy Story': The narrative world of entrepreneurship and the creation of constructivist methodology*, "Strategic Management Journal" 2007, No. 21/9.

[14] R. Smith, A.R. Anderson, *The devil is in the e-tale: forms and structures in the entrepreneurial narratives*, [in:] D. Hjorth, C. Steyaert (eds.), *Narrative and Discursive Approaches in Entrepreneurship*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, Northampton 2004, p. 126.

[15] E. O'Connor, *Storytelling to be real: narrative, legitimacy building and venturing*, [in:] D. Hjorth, C. Steyaert (eds.), *Narrative and Discursive Approaches in Entrepreneurship*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, Northampton 2004, p. 105.

[16] A.D. Cruz, E. Hamilton, S. Jack, *Understanding entrepreneurial cultures in family businesses: A study of family entrepreneurial teams in Honduras*, "Journal of Family Business Strategy" 2012, No. 3/3, pp. 147-161.

[17] A. Branstad, *Exploring collective entrepreneurship through a case narrative. Insightful Encounters - Regional Development and Practice–Based Learning*, "Conference on Regional Development and In-

entrepreneurship is an inherently individualistic endeavor, some argue that we will better understand entrepreneurship when we see it as a collective phenomenon.

Methodological framework for narrative analysis

It can be assumed that most often the study of narratives is related to the study of specific cases of individual stories. In such cases, we need to use qualitative research tools related to content analysis, organizational ethnography, case studies analysis or other qualitative methodological approaches. Such methodologies are based on inductive reasoning and an approach of an exploratory research, in this sense, the researcher seeks and interprets events or phenomena without prior assumptions or initial theses.

As Stebbins noted that "exploration and inductive reasoning are important in science in part because deductive logic alone can never uncover new ideas and observations"[18]. This case analysis used a qualitative method of unstructured observation[19], when "research obtains data without the direct participation of the respondents. It also enables the investigator to gather information which could not be obtained utilizing traditional research methodology"[20]. In this case, information, data are collected through the use of secondary sources such as newspaper articles, reports, websites, blogs. We therefore apply analysis to stories provided by various sources, using triangulation of information channels to capture the nature and core meaning of stories.

The figure below shows the research perspective of entrepreneurship adopted in the article (Figure 1). The perspective is based on underlining the meaning of the narratives as an integral (though less explored than the material or human dimension) field of the entrepreneurship phenomenon.

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novation Processes" March 5th-7th 2008, Porvoo - Borgå, Finland 2008, https://www.semanticscholar.org [access: 16.07.2022].

[18] R.A. Stebbins, *Exploring. In Exploratory research in the social sciences*, SAGE Publications Inc. 2001, p. 24.

[19] See: L.M. Given, *Unstructured observation. The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods,* SAGE Publications 2008, p. 908; C. Walshe, G. Ewing, J. Griffiths, *Using observation as a data collection method to help understand patient and professional roles and actions in palliative care settings,* "Palliative Medicine" 2012, No. 26/8, pp. 1048-1054.

[20] R. Khan, *A critical analysis of Elon Musk's leadership in Tesla motors*, "Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research" 2021, p. 3.

Figure 1. Conceptual approach to entrepreneurship phenomenon
Rysunek 1. Podejście konceptualne do zjawiska przedsiębiorczości
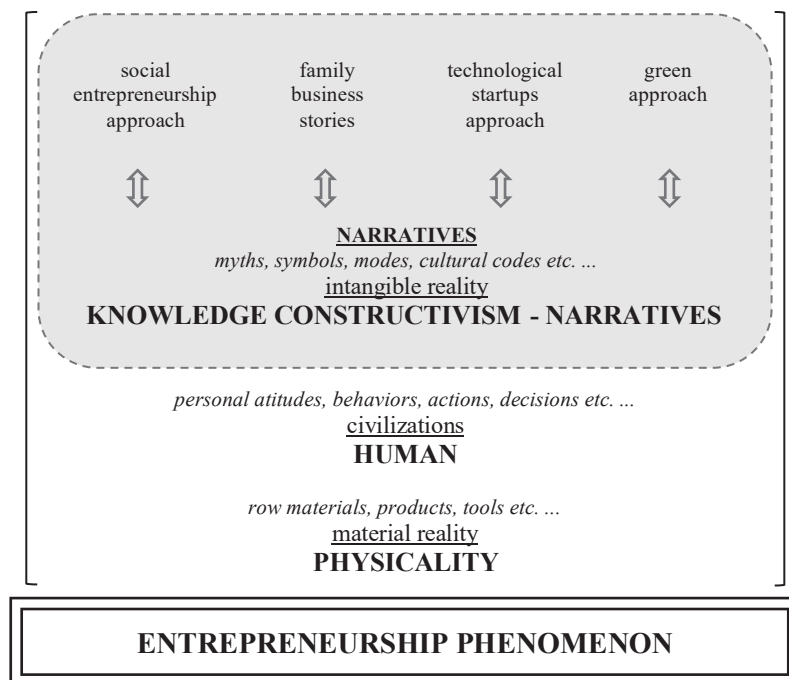
Source: own study.

Narrating business – contrasting examples

Most often, entrepreneurial stories are created based on the personality or self-creation of the leader, founder, or charismatic manager. It happens that the leader's personality is part of the story and at the same time this entrepreneurial personality builds a story about him(her)self and the business he(shy) is running. Perhaps the most spectacular example of this phenomenon is the figure of Apple's managing founder, Steve Jobs. As one of Jobs' friend said "he wants to control his environment and he sees the product as an extension of himself"[21]. Many authors assume that this was the case with one of the iconic business figures at the same time using narrative building and storytelling about the company's products in an excellent way. The beginning of the story building is the naming of the company itself connecting two items completely incompatible with each other "apple and computers, that doesn't go together! So it helped us grow brand awareness"[22].

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[21]　W. Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*, Simon & Schuster, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, New Delhi 2011, pp. 4-5.
[22]　Ibidem, p. 63.

Now, Apple is a world-renowned California-based consumer electronics and software company. The company created and commercialized the first widely available personal computer using a keyboard and monitor (Apple I). Inventor and closest associate of S. Jobs, S. Wozniak said "it never crossed my mind to sell computers. It was Steve (Jobs) who said, 'let's hold them in the air and sell a few'"[23]. The company's initial development as a apparently completely meaningless commercial and illusory venture has even become an icon of creative business and entrepreneurship. In the mid-1980s, the company invented and launched the first personal computer with a without a programming language. In the 1990s, the company went through a period of stagnation and restructuring, only to make a comeback in the 2000s with mobile electronics devices (iPhone, iPad, MacBook) (Photo. 1).

Photo. 1. Steve Jobs with his MacBook Air at Macworld 15 January 2008.
Fotografia 1. Steve Jobs z MacBookiem Air na targach Macworld 15 stycznia 2008 r.

Source: http://www.macrumors.com/2008/01/15/steve-jobs-with-macbook-air (Author: Matthew Yohe, CC-BY-3.0).

Apple's strategic business approach consisted of a specific and innovative narrative, Jobs was able to encourage people to define themselves as anticorporate, creative, innovative rebels simply by the computer they used. "Steve (Jobs) created the only lifestyle brand in the tech industry… there are cars people are proud to have Porsche, Ferrari, Prius, because what I drive says something about me. People feel the same way about an Apple product"[24]. Apple sold not products but dreams, personal ambitions and dreams of social status. "Think different" as the advertising slogan of the campaign meant to the consumer – I am different, I am better, I am special and unique. In addition, through the story of the uniqueness, quality and design of the product, the very experiencing, using, owning it was an adventure of luxury and uniqueness for the consumer. "Steve Jobs not only represents a brand but actually a generation of users who follow in the footsteps of his creativity"[25].

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[23] Ibidem, p. 62.
[24] Ibidem, p. 332.
[25] C. Villafañe, *Steve Jobs Marketing Lessons: 10 timeless lessons he's taught us and his most famous marketing quotes*, Postcron.com, https://postcron.com/en/blog/10-amazing-marketing-les-

The above example of Apple has contributed significantly to building a powerful story or entrepreneurial fairytale about California tech start-ups. Constructing business narratives can also lead to economic fraud and investment abuse. Narratives can become not only an inspiration for new entrepreneurs, but also a method of method of deceptions. American narratives about entrepreneurship created "a culture that has a soft spot for hucksters, spinners of tall tales and snake-oil salesmen who promise miracle cures"[26].

If we assume that Apple's stories were effective and led to commercial and branding success, it does not mean that this will always be the case. An example of stories that were just and exclusive stories without any real success or any commercialization is the case of the company Theranos and, above all, the charismatic "storyteller" Elizabeth Holmes[27]. E. Holmes was (is), in a way, a follower of S. Jobs, in the sense that the example of Apple's method of creating and "selling" stories inspired her to invent and sell her own business story. As it turned out, it was just a story and nothing more. E. Holmes as founder and CEO of Theranos company "modeled herself after Steve Jobs, in everything from speaking style to wardrobe"[28].

She used the skills to build a catchy narrative and managed to raise hundreds millions dollars from investors, whom she convinced to invest in her innovative startup Theranos. At only 31 years old, in 2014 she became the world's youngest billionaire, practically only due to her storytelling skills about her future brilliant technology startup. E. Holmes using narratives created a perfect illusion, created a fairy tale story, legitimizing a business fraud (as it turned out) in which institutions, global media and investors believed[29].

The goal of the Theranos fraudulent innovation was to create a universal portable device to replace a laboratory for medical analysis of a patient's blood. It was to be a revolution in medicine and the entire health care industry. But it turned out to be a billion-dollar fraud, and on July 14, 2018, an indictment was drawn up and a criminal trial began in a California court[30]. The indictment indicates that the com-

sons-steve-jobs-taught-us/#:~:text="Marketing%20is%20about%20values.,them%20to%20know%20about%20us [access: 20.07.2022].

[26] J. Surowiecki, *Theranos' Elizabeth Holmes mimicked Bill Gates and Steve Jobs. The difference is she failed.* "MSNBC" June 1 2021, https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/theranos-elizabeth-holmes-mimicked-bill-gates-steve-jobs-difference-she-n1269100 [access: 17.07.2022].

[27] One of Jobs' co-workers in the 1970s was named Elizabeth Holmes, a fact that, in conjunction with a fascination or obsession with Jobs, is the subject of guesswork and speculation. https://www.reddit.com/r/Theranos/comments/udubqy/around_the_70s_steve_jobs_had_a_girlfriend_named/ [access: 17.07.2022].

[28] S. Silver, *Steve Jobs, Theranos' Elizabeth Holmes, and when the 'reality distortion field' fails*, July 06 2018, https://appleinsider.com/articles/18/07/06/steve-jobs-theranos-elizabeth-holmes-and-when-the-reality-distortion-field-fails [access: 18.07.2022].

[29] J. Ho, *Purposeful life or sugar-coated lies: How Elizabeth Holmes legitimized her fraud*, "Language and Communication" 2021, Vol. 77, pp. 106-120.

[30] *Indictment, Northern California district court,* https://www.justice.gov/file/1072521/download [access: 6.08.2022].

pany, from 2003 to 2013, operated in a form of almost hidden (so-called: startup's stealth mode) to avoid uncovering its area of innovation. Since 2013, E. Holmes has launched a large media campaign based mainly on media speeches, interviews and generally talking about the potential of its business innovation[31] (Foto. 2).

Photo. 2. Elizabeth Holmes Theranos Chairman, CEO and Founder at TechCrunch Disrupt on September 8, 2014 in San Francisco, California
Fotografia 2. Elizabeth Holmes, prezes, dyrektor generalny i założyciel Theranos na Te- chCrunch Disrupt 8 września 2014 r. w San Francisco w Kalifornii

Source: adapted by authors from photo by Steve Jennings/Getty Images for TechCrunch (509306865DH00014_ TechCrunch, CC-BY-2.0), https://www.flickr.com/photos/techcrunch/14996838579.

Thus, based on Apple and Theranos examples, it seems that just as a narrative can be grounded and true, so can entrepreneurial projects be reliable and real. Consistently, stories can be illusions and merely create an unrealistic world. In any case, stories are an important part of entrepreneurial projects, and this is true whether in the technological innovations of California's Silicon Valley or in social- ly or environmentally oriented ventures.

Conclusion

The question of the narrative research and constructivist approach in business studies or more broadly in the organization sciences are present in the academic literature. Noteworthy are the works of Polish researchers as B. Czarniawska[32] and

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[31] Ibidem, p. 3.
[32] B. Czarniawska, *Narrating the Organization*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1997; B. Czarni- awska, *A Narrative Approach in Organization Studies*, Thousand Oaks, Sage 1998; B. Czarniawska, *Having hope in paralogy*, "Human Relations" 2001, Vol. 54(1), pp. 13-21; B. Czarniawska, *The styles*

M. Kostera[33] also worth noting the works of R. Mir, A. Watson[34], M. Avenier[35] or B. Gabryś[36]. One can argue with the rather common statement that innovation or business entrepreneurship by definition is a good thing[37]. Innovation or business entrepreneurship is often based on a story, appropriately constructed and appropriately merchandized and/or communicated.

It seems that it is possible to see a changing stream of entrepreneurial stories from liberal capitalism through the mythology of digital business and technological startups to the contemporary development of institutional entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship. The latest period in the evolution of entrepreneurial narratives is the development of green or ecological entrepreneurship.

It seems that research on the meaning of narrative, organizational discourse or ways of knowledge construction is needed in the development of practical and theoretical knowledge in the field of management and organizational sciences. This paper makes some contribution to the scientific discussion in the field of innovative entrepreneurship research in humanities and discursive perspectives.

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