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**The ‘Tango-Argentino’: a metaphor for understanding  
effectuation processes**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The authors' use the analogy of the Argentine Tango to illuminate entrepreneurial effectuation as a process of becoming. Drawing on the metaphor of dance, the authors highlight seven areas for theory development that could further a performative theory of effectuation. These include, the study of the micro-level movement and flow in the dance as 'intimate steps,' and understanding the interplay between entrepreneur and ecosystem as 'contextual rhythms.' They further propose that the study of changing leadership in the dance could illuminate how causal processes 'become' effectual and suggest a concept of 'attunement' to consider how inexperienced entrepreneurs learn contextual rhythms and therefore benefit for effectuation processes. Finally they posit that the intimate steps leading to creativity in the dance relative to different levels of proximity and distance between the dancers should be understood alongside the movements and flows through which dancers maintain their individuality during such intimate movements and flows.

### **Keywords**

Entrepreneurship, effectuation, metaphor, performativity, becoming, tango

## Opening stance

This paper is concerned with illuminating effectuation processes with the use of metaphor and we seek to outline a route by which a performative theory of effectuation could be developed. We first note the reflections by Shane (2012, p. 14) in an earlier publication of which he was co-author (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000):

“We have little more understanding of the process by which people exploit opportunities within existing organizations than we had a decade ago. We also have advanced very little in our knowledge of how entrepreneurs identify opportunities, formulate business ideas, and evaluate them.”

A key function in the entrepreneurial act is “the process of creating or seizing an opportunity and pursuing it to create something of value” (Glassman et al. 2003, p. 354). It is considered to be the means by which entrepreneurs create new wealth-producing resources or bestow existing resources with wealth creating potential (Drucker, 2002). Discussion seems to have coalesced into two processual theories of entrepreneurship, effectuation and causation (Perry, Chandler, & Markova, 2012). In recent years, a processual view of entrepreneurship has also become the subject of discussion (See, Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Jack, Dodd, & Anderson, 2008; Moroz & Hindle, 2012; Steyaert, 2007; Steyaert, 2012) and it is to this developing stream of literature that we append our contribution. We take the position that effectuation processes are emergent and in a continuous state of becoming (Garud, Gehman & Tharchen, 2017; Steyaert, 2012; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), created through collective endeavour. In opposition to appeals for somewhat individualistic and static cause and effect modelling of effectuation, Garud and

Gehman, (2016), and most recently Garud et al. (2017) point to the need to better consider the performativity of effectuation. These authors discuss performativity as an onto-epistemological challenge to the underlying assumptions in a body of work, in this case work considering entrepreneurial opportunities.

One of the core problems with visualizing effectuation is the continuous process of adaptation between entrepreneur and felicitous context (Sarason, Dean, & Dillard, 2006). To help visualize the motion and flow between entrepreneurs and context we choose the metaphor of dance as a lens to further problematize the literature on effectuation. Our contribution therefore rests in the combination of performativity and the use of metaphor to problematize the effectuation literature. As an onto-epistemological stance (Garud et al., 2017) performativity allows us to challenge the dominant philosophical stance in the effectuation literature –that it is intrinsically path dependent (Sarasvathy, 2008)). We attempt to integrate the ongoing problematization of this literature which challenges the ‘real’ notions of opportunity and the static visualization of effectuation (McMullen, 2015; Moroz & Hindle, 2012; Ramoglou & Tsang, 2016; Steyaert, 2007; Steyaert, 2012). The core novelty we offer to this developing problematization is a more collective, spontaneous and improvisational notion of effectuation processes. We choose here to advocate the Argentine Tango as a similarly helpful metaphor to communicate effectuation as a spontaneous act, but better to inculcate notions of co-creation, and further offering a potential sensemaking tool for entrepreneurs in the unfolding enactment of opportunity creation. In furthering a discussion of the performativity of effectuation theory, we attempt integrate the dialogical movements of two or more dancers in an emergent performance in which the opportunity does not precede the

dance, but indeed rests in the unrehearsed performative act. We consider all movements in the dance are *performance* but not all movements are *performative*. This further enables us to consider the felicitous context of the dancers such as the dance floor, the music and rhythm, the choice and changing of partners, leadership in the dance and the closeness of relations between the dancers – and how that affects the performance and the performativity of the Tango Argentino. This allows us to respect Sawyer’s (2015) caution that an improvisational metaphor must consider both freedom and structure. We offer a visualization of the spontaneity and freedom of the entrepreneurs as dancers in the context of ecosystems as dance floors.

Pertinently, in his famous 1989 article, Gartner asked, “how do we know a dancer from the dance?” arguing that we cannot disassociate the performance from the performer; similarly, we cannot understand ‘who’ the entrepreneur is without analyzing the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of entrepreneurship. In this performance, the dancers are often in close proximity, moving at times to distances that enhance the aesthetic of the dance, sometimes moving at different paces and in different directions. Equally, the dance may also involve, reversals, re-starts, changes of direction, collisions and falls (Gupta, Chiles, & McMullen, 2016). However, many dances have formal recognized and rehearsed steps and movements, conforming more to a process of causation – a series of recognized steps in the entrepreneurial process. With our focus on effectuation, we therefore choose to offer a corollary to the dance metaphor of the ‘Argentine Tango’, to better visualize the spontaneous, emergent and adaptive movement between entrepreneur and context during the performance of effectuation

The Argentine Tango is an improvisational dance characterized as a dialogue of two (or more) bodies. It is a supra-individual ensemble, which requires instantaneous communication

and an enhanced sensitivity to one's partner's more-or-less immediate intentions (Kimmel & Preuschl, 2016). Historically, Tango was used to bridge socio-gender interaction norms. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Argentina *milonga*, a traditional Tango dance club, was the only place where unmarried men and women could be physically close to each other in a socially acceptable manner (Denniston, 2007). Close interaction is a defined characteristic of the Argentine Tango, with its close grip between the dance partners. The dance is constructed and configured around the tension between the partners, who are either following each other or flowing in opposite directions, but always remaining in contact throughout, "when every moment can be an invention" (Kimmel, 2009, p. 76). In the Argentine Tango, no gender role is attached to the role of leader; both partners can lead or follow at various points within the dance. Traditionally, Tango was taught in male and female-only schools, so partners were fluent in both roles. The only co-educational dance was happening in *milongas*, regular dance events (usually weekly), that often begin with dance classes and sometimes demonstration dances (Denniston, 2007).

Whilst the Tango metaphor has been discussed in the specific context of entrepreneurship (See, for example, Gaudet, 2013), those deploying the metaphor have not proposed a more nuanced deployment that could be used to better understand causation and effectuation processes. We will argue here that a processual approach to entrepreneurship research would benefit from a more suitable metaphor and propose the 'Argentine Tango' as such a metaphor to enhance our specific understanding of the performativity of effectuation. The research question we therefore propose in this paper is: *How can the Argentine Tango metaphor enhance our understanding of the performativity of effectuation processes?* In visualizing the dance as a performance act, we must observe the motion and flow of the dance, the dancers, the dance

floor, we see the fashions of the dancers, the reaction of the audience, hear the music, sense the atmosphere and are aware of our emotional reaction to the ensemble of contextual influences – resembling a complex entrepreneurial ecosystem (Hoffman & Devereaux Jennings, 2011; Stam, 2015). To better understand the effectuation process within the felicitous context of an entrepreneurial ecosystem, we feel the Argentine Tango metaphor is illuminating.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: we begin with *costumes and makeup*, (the philosophical and semantic garb through which we problematize the effectuation literature). We then explore *the opportunity in the performance* (performance as the ‘becoming’ of opportunity). Next comes *let's dance – movement and rhythm, choose your partners, do you mind if I lead, hold me closer, but don't cramp my style* – where we consider how the dance develops in a felicitous context. The *final flourish* outlines the contributions of our paper, whilst *save the next dance* outlines the paper's limitations, and outlines a future research agenda. We now seek in this paper to visualize entrepreneurship processes as “enactments-unfolding processes involving actors making choices interactively, in inescapably local conditions, by drawing on broader rules and resource” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 577). However, we must first prepare for our performance.

## **Costumes and makeup**

We first attempt to establish our philosophical position in relation to our subsequent discussion. We see this as the philosophical ‘garb’ of our discourse. Performativity has been argued to be an onto-epistemological stance (Garud et al., 2017) which, in effect, problematizes the underlying assumptions in a body of work (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011).



The notion of ‘critical’ performativity in critical management studies has been argued to be a “subversive intervention into management discourses” (Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2016, p. 226). A review of the performativity literature reveals different endeavours in its use, including ‘doing things with words’ (Gond, Cabantous, Harding & Learmonth, 2016). However, Garud et al. (2017) are concerned about the reduction of all things to words, and suggest performativity can be used to contest the power of words alone. In contra-distinction to the work identified by Gond, et al. (2016) which views performativity as a simple ‘measure of efficiency’, Garud et al. (2017, p. 3) suggest that performativity is the “relational-temporal effects constitutive of unfolding journeys” and conducted in the presence of felicitous conditions. We adopt this conceptualization of performativity in this paper, and thus move our analysis from outcomes to emergence. These felicitous contextual conditions could include, for example, various combinations of technology, partners, networks and ecosystems. We note, as Gond, et al. (2016, p. 3) comment in their review, that there have been attempts to deploy performativity in order to ‘bring theory into being’, such as that by Gehman, Trevino, and Garud (2013). Thus, we identify here the opportunity to use further metaphorical garb to advance the problematization of the effectuation literature and to develop a performative theory of effectuation – thus helping to bring a performative theory of effectuation into being.

A number of years ago, Morgan (1996) illustrated how metaphors can aid our understanding of organizations and organizational issues in theory and in practice. He argued that all theory is metaphorical and generates different ways of seeing and thinking about organizational life. In his early work (Morgan, 1980; Morgan & Ramirez, 1984) he identified a number of organizational metaphors (such as machine, culture and psychic-prison) which

were deployed by different paradigms in the social sciences and organization theory. He argued that different metaphors can open up new possibilities by questioning the traditional assumptions guiding our understanding of a phenomenon. A metaphor involves information being transferred from a familiar domain (the ‘source domain’) to a new, yet unknown domain (the ‘target domain’) (Tsoukas, 2009). In this sense, metaphor can be a useful facilitator of problematization although the recognition of such potential at present seems limited. There are two main theories addressing how metaphors work, the *correspondence* theory and the *domain interaction* theory (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011) – and the former predominates. Central to this approach is finding a good ‘fit’ or correspondence between the formulated metaphor and the phenomenon. The latter theory sees metaphor theorizing as a creative act which generates new meanings through the connection and interaction between the source and target domains, on the assumption that metaphors not only *describe* reality but actually *constitute* reality (Tsoukas, 2009).

Entrepreneurial narratives are embodied in metaphors (Duncan & Pelly, 2016). Metaphors are powerful tools for sense-making, sense-giving and the development of theory (Latusek & Vlaar, 2015). Metaphors emphasize a particular aspect of what we want to describe and downplay other aspects, those which do not fit the metaphor (Jackson & Carter, 2007). However, a problem with metaphors is that they tend to focus more on similarities rather than contradictions (Oswick, Keenoy, & Grant, 2002), and the use of a metaphor often gives the impression of capturing the essence of a process rather than one possible image of the phenomenon (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011). A further problem with metaphors is that ‘bad’ metaphors with strong rhetorical attractiveness rather than theoretical value can distort our

understanding of a phenomenon (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011; Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982), including through a process of fallacious reification (Oswick et al., 2002). A metaphor can therefore be both costume and makeup that enhances a dance, or provides a distraction from the substantive quality of the movements.

Notwithstanding the concerns expressed above, our view is that there are a number of advantages in using metaphors in exploration of entrepreneurial phenomena. They help us communicate ideas about complex social phenomenon, encourage us to view familiar phenomenon from different perspectives, and to critically question our assumptions about them (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011). The entrepreneurship literature contains a number of examples of metaphors being used to explain the entrepreneurial construct (Clarke, Holt, & Blundel, 2014; Cornelissen, Clarke, & Cienki, 2012; Tidd, 2012). We note that metaphors have been utilized in three main ways:

First, a number of studies have focused on identifying metaphors used by entrepreneurs (Clarke & Holt, 2010) and non-entrepreneurs to describe entrepreneurship (Dodd, Jack, & Anderson, 2013; Henry, Warren-Smith, Martin, Scott, & Smith, 2014; Hyrsky, 1999; Lundmark & Westelius, 2014). Metaphors have been used to describe sets of behaviours (Nicholson & Anderson, 2005), for example, Koironen (1995) found descriptions of entrepreneurs as ‘warrior’, ‘superman’, ‘explorer’, ‘mother’, ‘marathon runner’, ‘lion’, ‘whirlwind’, ‘magnet’ and ‘captain’. Such action-orientated metaphors typically show the entrepreneur as a heroic figure in a performance, displaying attributes such as strength, bravery and authority. Here, the entrepreneurial metaphor helps to perpetuate the popular notion of the entrepreneur in a solitary individual performance. The metaphors are predominantly and

stereotypically male, referring to the entrepreneur as ‘conqueror’, ‘the lonely hero’ and ‘the patriarch’ (Wee & Brooks, 2012). The entrepreneurs themselves generally prefer processual and emotionally- charged metaphors for describing their performance (e.g. ‘iconoclasm’, ‘parenthood’, ‘war’, ‘journey’), and do not use the mechanistic metaphors used in academic discourse (Dodd, 2002).

A second stream of research has reviewed and critically reflected upon the root metaphors underlying the academic discourse on entrepreneurship (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011; Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013). Dodd and Anderson (2007) posit that early approaches to entrepreneurship research focused on behaviours such as trait theory, have generally been discarded in favour of a broader conception that embraces more sophisticated, socio-psychological approaches. These include cognition theory (See, for example, Yamakawa, Peng, & Deeds, 2015) and socio-economic approaches, such as networking (Huggins & Thompson, 2015), or population ecology theory (Aldrich & Wiedenmayer, 1993). Langley et al. (2013) refer to a review of process conceptualizations of organizational change and development by Van De Ven (1992), noting that most representations of organizational processes appear to either draw on life cycle metaphors that attempt to predict linear progressions or on teleological models focused on developing normative ‘step-by-step’ guides.

These narratives posit the entrepreneurial performance as a series of choreographed steps, or in a teleological approach, as having a defined start and end point but which may have several routes between the two points. Langley et al. (2013) point to the central role of tension, contradiction, paradox, and dialectics in driving patterns of change. Alongside life-cycle and

teleological theories of process, Van de Ven and Poole (1995) also speak of dialectic approaches to theory which seem to have been underexplored through metaphor.

A third research stream has proposed new metaphors in order to deepen our understanding of entrepreneurial processes as a more emergent performance. A number of studies have introduced collective and relational metaphors, for example 'entrepreneurial village' (Danes, 2013) 'parenthood' (Cardon, Zietsma, Saporito, Matherne, & Davis, 2005), 'co-evolution' (Clarke et al., 2014), 'theatre' (Anderson, 2005). Others have introduced new metaphors in order to highlight entrepreneurial behaviour as a creative process rather than an economically rational and linear one, such as 'quilting' (Campbell, Hjorth, & Steyaert, 2004), 'making cakes' (Harper & Endres, 2010), 'curating' (Litchfield & Gilson, 2013), and 'bricolage' (Senyard, Baker, Steffens, & Davidsson, 2014). The 'kaleidoscope' metaphor aims to communicate the way creative imagination works (Chiles et al., 2013). In a similar vein Steyaert (2012) suggests 'dance' as a metaphor in order to emphasize entrepreneurial processes as constant movement. Such metaphors would seem most adeptly deployed to explain evolutionary process theories – those without defined start and end points (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995).

None of the existing entrepreneurial metaphors, with the possible exception of theatre (Anderson, 2005), help us to understand co-created performativity in effectuation processes. The most common metaphors underpinning the three research streams we have identified (heroic, root and performance) have been criticised for not being able to account for the relational, collective, paradoxical and emotional aspects of entrepreneurship (Cardon et al., 2005; Chiles, Elias, Zarankin, & Vultee, 2013; Clarke, et al., 2014). Hence, within these metaphors lie some distinctions between choreography, agency and spontaneity, which broadly

seem to conform to the dialectic between entrepreneurship as causation or effectuation. However, for Steyaert (2012, p.160) the dance is an agreed upon choreography where “dancing is the continual creation of space, a trace of trace-making” and, although he invites us to consider entrepreneurship as a processual dance, his interpretation of the metaphor does not account for the improvisational nature of effectuation which, we agree, is supported more effectively by our Argentine Tango metaphor.

It is to the second and third approaches that we append our metaphorical approach. Our Tango metaphor extends our understanding of entrepreneurial processes as “unfolding journeys” (Garud et al., 2017, p. 3) by offering an emergent process view that can be used to highlight how effectuation takes place between entrepreneurs, and between entrepreneurs, stakeholders and their felicitous contexts. It combines both a dialogic and evolutionary take on process (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). We seek to illuminate effectuation processes as a co-created, spontaneous and emergent phenomena, much like the performance of the Argentine Tango. In this conceptualization, the choreography does not precede the dance, and the opportunity is embedded in the dance. We must first highlight the theoretical garb and the underlying philosophical assumptions in that work.

### **The opportunity in the performance**

Having settled on the philosophical garb of metaphor, we must further extrapolate our theoretical costumery. The relationship between the entrepreneurial person and opportunity is a central theme in the entrepreneurship literature (Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, & Wright, 2014; Shane, 2003). Two schools of thought have emerged in relation to entrepreneurial

opportunities, the ‘discovery’ school and the ‘creation’ school. The opportunity discovery school that assumes that opportunities are objective phenomena that can be discovered by individuals with more information and better cognition (Shane, 2000). This debate has led to a further discussion as to whether opportunities therefore preexist their recognition (Alvarez & Barney, 2013; Ramoglou & Tsang, 2016). One take on this debate is that opportunities can be created in the very performance of the entrepreneurial act – that they are in fact an emergent property of the performance and therefore the performance is the ‘becoming’ of the opportunity. Effectuation theory was developed by Sarasvathy and colleagues and introduced as an alternative decision-making logic used by entrepreneurs in creating opportunities (Sarasvathy, 2001a, 2008) in contraposition to a more deterministic notion of opportunity identification as a process of causation (Martin & Wilson, 2014; Perry et al., 2012). Sarasvathy (2001b, p. 6) articulates an approach to the performance of actions within entrepreneurship processes based on the principles of affordable loss, strategic partnerships and leveraging contingencies, each of which is reliant on the underlying logic of effectual reasoning which states, “to the extent that we can control the future, we do not need to predict it.”

Recently Garud et al. (2017) discuss the dichotomy between opportunity discovery and opportunity creation, capable of being bridged by a performative theory of entrepreneurial opportunity. They point, however, to a tendency in both theories to see the entrepreneurial context as ‘real’ and ‘out there’, but with a greater tendency in the discovery school to see opportunities as pre-existing entrepreneurial awareness of them. There seems, therefore, to be significant scope to elucidate how a spontaneous and improvised opportunity creation and its underlying effectuation processes, emerges. They also elucidate how such a performative

theory of effectuation might include consideration of felicitous context in the performance of the opportunity. In this endeavour, Bhowmick (2011) has helpfully described effectuation as a dialectic mechanism that recognizes the agency of multiple stakeholders (including the entrepreneur) in the formation of the opportunity. An effectual process is dialectic because the process is led by the entrepreneur but dependent on the commitment and engagement of other stakeholders.

In contrast to the rational and linear logic of causation, the effectual approach is based on three logics using the available means as a process for creating new goals and means: (1) Who you are: the logic of identity, as opposed to the logic of preferences, (2) What you know: the logic of action, as opposed to the logic of belief, and (3) Whom you know: the logic of commitment, as opposed to the logic of transaction (Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005). The first logic, the identity perspective, makes it possible for us to construct preferences in situation when we do not have any; we can experiment with preferences and play them against each other. The second logic challenges the idea of calculating the probability of success before you act and is based on the assumption that meaningful action will change the circumstances and markets are artifacts created by this action not forces of nature. Through action you learn. The last logic refers to interactions with stakeholders. In the effectual approach the artifact is formed through the interaction with stakeholders that commit to the project. They are not sought out in order to fulfil a particular aspiration, but are part of a new network creating unpredictable outcomes through their involvement. In contrast to the opportunity discovery theory that assumes that opportunities are objective phenomena that can be discovered by individuals with more information and better cognition (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), effectuation theory is



considered as a creative process view on entrepreneurship because it is a non-teleological theory where the meaning and opportunities are created by the human actors involved in the process (Steyaert, 2007).

We therefore seek to append our contribution to the developing problematization of the entrepreneurial literature (McMullen, 2015; Moroz & Hindle, 2012; Ramoglou & Tsang, 2016;) challenging the underlying realist assumptions in the opportunity discovery literature. We take a further step by further adding to the processual perspective on effectuation by visualizing a spontaneous and improvised picture of effectuation in a felicitous context. In the Argentine Tango, the performance does not follow a set pattern of predictable movements. Rather the Tango represents a spontaneous and adaptive approach with movement between entrepreneur and context reflecting the performativity of effectuation. Effectuation is considered to be a creative process view of entrepreneurship because it is a non-teleological theory where the meaning and opportunities are created by the human actors involved in the process (Steyaert, 2007). In this sense, we consider that the improvisational nature of the Argentine Tango creates a non-teleological quality quite distinct from other entrepreneurial metaphors. The logic of effectuation suggests that control (of the dance) can be maintained through taking small steps in one direction instead of working towards long-term goals that often have unpredictable (non-teleological) outcomes. By approaching effectuation in this way, the dancer, through the performance of the dance, is able to negotiate new goals and means whilst avoiding investing time, energy and/or money they are not actually willing to lose. The logic of effectuation also embraces the principle of entering into collaborations and strategic partnerships. Like the Argentine Tango, this approach emphasizes the value of prioritizing

different types of partners willing to commit to the moment, rather than seeking out potential partners who might not be available or motivated. This principle is based on the understanding that when engaging new partners with different and unanticipated perspectives, the dancer must be open to changes of direction as a result of new partners and partnerships. Detours and mistakes are inevitable elements of the effectuation process, and the dancers must learn to work with them and identify opportunities for development that might arise in such situations. Having adorned our philosophical and theoretical garb, we turn next to begin our dance and expose the potential performativity of effectuation.

## **Let's Dance**

We visualize the dance as beginning with a choice of dance partners and we choose to see the dance floor as crowded, with multiple dancers aesthetically enhancing the overall performance of the dance on the dance floor.

## **Movement and rhythm**

We have proposed earlier that entrepreneurship processes be conceptualized as an act of becoming (Steyaert, 2012; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). In proposing the idea of performativity, Garud and Gehman, (2016, p. 546) propose that an effectual act is “continually constituted by sociomaterial entanglements rather than independent objects with given boundaries and properties” – in essence advocating that the entrepreneurial act be considered as a performance enacted in time and space (after Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). To truly understand the entrepreneurial act as a process of becoming, we suggest considering process at the micro-level of movement in the performance, and at its most intimate. We propose that processual studies should focus

on the steps of the performance through which an entrepreneur adapts to the movements of their partnership and the felicitous rhythms of the specific context in which they are performing. Entrepreneurial motion and flow should, through this route, be captured as attuned to contextually specific rhythms, each entrepreneurial ecosystem thus having a distinct rhythm.

We suggest that an understanding of 'entrepreneurial ecosystems', which has recently emerged (Autio et al., 2014; Spigel, 2015; Stam, 2015) can also be enhanced by consideration of the Argentine Tango metaphor. In our conceptualization, ecosystems are the dance floors; an increasingly pertinent metaphor, we argue, to the burgeoning use of 'platform' ecosystems as foci for co-creativity (Adner, 2017) founded on entrepreneurial interactions that build social capital (Anderson & Jack, 2002). Engel, Kaandorp and Elfring (2017, p. 37) theorize about the importance of effectual networking under conditions of uncertainty. Ecosystems are complex networks with high degrees of complexity and studies of such systems are encumbered by high levels of causal ambiguity. They suggest that effectual networking "requires a more altruistic approach to interpersonal interactions and openness to unexpected contingencies as networking activities stimulate serendipitous goal formation and transformation". Countering what they perceive to be the dominant *causal* logic of entrepreneurial networking studies, rather than effectual networking leading to entrepreneurial action, they propose that networking *is* entrepreneurial action. Such a processual viewpoint is analogous with the Argentine Tango metaphor, in that the dancers, must adopt a more altruistic approach to interpersonal interactions, or movements within the dance, enabling them to remain open to unexpected contingencies associated with serendipitous movements on the dancefloor. They note that uncertainty can form the very basis of contextual boundary judgments. Indeed, the Argentine

Tango enables us to gain insight into aspects of effectuation that have been overlooked by previous studies that have also adopted a processual view of effectuation. The spontaneous and unplanned nature of the Argentine Tango dance helps reveal how spontaneous and unintended partnerships emerge between the dancers.

Entrepreneurial interactions might be considered as movements in the performance of the steps of the Tango dance through which an entrepreneur adapts to the rhythms of the specific context in which they are performing. Both the movement and the rhythm of the dancers aesthetically enhancing the overall performance of the dance. Each dance floor has a rhythm and the choice of partners may be the next crucial decision to maximize creativity in the dance. The movements and flows of inexperienced co-located entrepreneurs will initially be less in tune with these rhythms, and will initially tend to follow a series of prescribed steps to find opportunities. Dancing with multiple partners on the dance floor enables novice entrepreneurs, who might not be able to improvise, to become attuned to their environment and move way from predictive logic (Dew et al. 2009). Thus, the Argentine Tango metaphor can aid our processual understanding of how novice entrepreneurs become expert entrepreneurs, moving from predictive to effectual logic. However, we propose that more experienced dancers can improvise – they can create new steps due to their attunement with contextual rhythms, gaining increasing confidence over time. The advantage of using the Argentine Tango metaphor in exploring the performativity of effectuation is thereby focusing upon both the time and space dimensions of the performance and the micro-level movements taken within that space. Particularly, spaces denote specific contextual rhythms and one could explore how inexperienced entrepreneurs ‘become’ attuned to the rhythms of particular dance floors. Such

attunement includes choices of partners, the proximity to other influential stakeholders, leadership and individual creativity, which we move to discuss.

## **Choose your partners**

Engel, et al. (2017, p. 41) recently note that little is known about the “behavioral interaction element of effectual processes”. Partner choice should therefore also be considered carefully in the dance.

Sarasvathy (2001b) argued that entrepreneurs also use an alternative logic when the means are known to them, but the goals are not. They have goals for the future, but more importantly, they consider what they can do with their prior knowledge (what they know), their identity (who they are) and their social networks (who they know). They start out with a general aspiration for the future, but the actual product or service developed is the result of their interaction with stakeholders who are willing to commit to the venture. Through this interaction they create new goals and means together. The tendency to return to the individual entrepreneur has been pointed out by a number of researchers, including those who argue for a processual orientation (Bygrave & Hofer, 1991; Gartner, 1989; Sarasvathy, Kumar, York & Bhagavatula, 2014). As new stakeholders commit to the venture the goals and means continue to grow as these new partners have other abilities, knowledge and networks. The interactions result in new ideas, products and markets that could not have been foreseen at the beginning. At the heart of this process is the principle that entrepreneurs do not need to predict the future with traditional market analyses because they control it through strategic alliances with multiple partners. It

would be necessary to consider the notion of spontaneous and unplanned adaptation in the dance as the dance unfolds.

Investment in new ideas is also based on the principle of affordable loss, i.e. the entrepreneur only commits to an investment that she/he can afford to lose, and the entrepreneurial process has to be adapted to this. Sarasvathy (2008) has formulated this as five principles: (1) The Bird-in-the-Hand principle: starting with means and creating new effects, (2) The Affordable-Loss principle, (3) The Crazy-Quilt principle, (4) The Lemonade principle, and (5) The Pilot-in-the-Plane principle: non-predictive control. In order to further conceptualize the entrepreneurial process as social practice rather than the product of individual cognition, Fletcher and Watson (2008, p. 151) have utilized the relational dimension of entrepreneurial processes, in order to give “primary emphasis to the joint co-ordinations through (and by) which entrepreneurial opportunities are brought into being and realized.”

Such ‘conjoint’ collaboration comes from the combination of and interaction between two or more entrepreneurs, each bringing different capabilities to the co-creative process and different and ongoing pressures to adjust and adapt to each other. Tidd (2012) identifies three mechanisms that contribute to entrepreneurial interactions: i) complementary capabilities that combine the productive use of entrepreneurs’ skills, experience, aptitude, insight, and circumstance; ii) creative conflict that arises due to differences in personalities, creative and cognitive style, domain-specific knowledge and experience, and iii) adjacent networks where entrepreneurs can collect the resources they require through a complex network of relationships. The Argentine Tango metaphor helps us visualize the adaptive effectual interactions that take place between the actors involved in the co-creative entrepreneurial

process and improve our understanding of endogenous processes where the goal develops through adaptive interaction, and the leadership and control are simultaneously or at different points in time, shared by different stakeholders. In the Argentine Tango, the performance may be considered as more than the entanglement of two dancers, but instead the interaction of multiple dancers within the defined space but changing over time. The performance is also the sum of multiple performers and the ecosystem of the dance (costumes, makeup, lights, music, and rhythms). We suggest entrepreneurial promiscuity as a term to be further explored as a dialectic process in the early stages of opportunity creation processes. Whilst entrepreneurs are thought to rely earlier on existing networks – in essence, the dancer arrives and chooses initially a known partner with whom to dance, promiscuity on the dancefloor may lead quickly to new dance partners. We must next consider the principle of leadership in, and of the dance.

### **Do you mind if I lead?**

In considering the principle of leadership, at a dyadic level, one partner leads, and one partner follows, at the level of a triad, a buyer or consumer judges the value of the interaction. An attraction of the Argentine Tango metaphor is the gender neutrality in terms of leadership, and that either partner can lead at any time. At the level of network are lead firms that determine the rhythms in an ecosystem. Such lead firms could be small, medium, and large commercial or public sector organizations that have forward and/or backward commercial linkages with significant numbers of micro, small, or medium scale enterprises (MSMEs) who are often key innovators in their ecosystems (Lusby, 2008). There is a requirement for lead firms to develop the appropriate capabilities to support the inter-firm activities they deploy (Perks & Moxey, 2011).

Thus, we propose that lead firms play an essential part in helping build performative entrepreneurial ecosystems that nurture effectuation processes. Constantly changing leadership is an integral part of the Argentine Tango. The metaphor helps us understand how lead firms manage the changing of stakeholders or dance partners (including scientists, brokers, collaborators, co-investigators, policy-makers, and industry and civil society stakeholders and funders) and changes of leader within the dance, those dancing in the spotlight and those at the periphery, but constantly being drawn centre stage, and under the spotlight. Created during the dance is an original combination of movements, resulting in a new dance every time. Similarly, business enterprises and the activities of entrepreneurs and others are always emergent, in a process of becoming (Steyaert, 2012).

### **Hold me closer**

Sawyer (2015) discusses the need for an improvisational metaphor of creativity to consider the tension between freedom and structure. Our conceptualization has so far given fair consideration to the freedom of the dancers, but we must further consider how proximity might offer some notion of constraint to improvisation. Close interaction and intimacy between the dance partners is a defining characteristic of the Argentine Tango. Visualizing the dance floor as a complex ecosystem enables us to observe the co-proximity of the dancers in their performance and to develop a deeper understanding of the conditions by which partners change and knowledge is transferred between dancers. Partners occupying the dance floor can observe the movement and flow of the other dancers, and copy some of their moves, and potentially build on them to an extent that they are more greatly appreciated by the audience. We observed earlier that the theory of effectuation was most popularly associated with experienced



entrepreneurs, but in understanding the spaces between entrepreneurs on a dance floor, the process of learning can be better visualized. For the dancers, being familiar with the contextual rhythms of the dance in each ecosystem aids knowledge transfer- this we see as a metaphor for cognitive proximity (Gubbins & Dooley, 2014), which denotes similarities in the way people perceive, interpret, understand and evaluate situations (Huber, 2012). At the same time, the dancers remain separate, maintaining cognitive distance that yields opportunities for novel combinations that generate new ideas (Nooteboom, Van Haverbeke, Duysters, Gilsing, & Van den Oord, 2007).

Cognitive distance can also result in falls and failures (Gubbins & Dooley, 2014) within the dance, but, when successful, leads to original steps and movements being created. We noted earlier that the dance may also involve, reversals, re-starts, changes of direction, collisions and falls (Gupta et al., 2016). In outlining the theory of effectuation, Sarasvathy (2001b) spoke of entrepreneurs accepting ‘affordable loses’. Garud et al. (2017, p. 3) discuss the problem of using pejorative terms such as ‘misfires’ and ‘failures’ and suggest that in advancing a theory of entrepreneurial performativity the term ‘overflows’ is preferred. In the motion and flow of a performative theory of effectuation, we therefore advocate that it be considered as the constitution, de-constitution and re-constitution of opportunity. Hence, not only are the dialectic ‘overflows’ of the dancers to be treated as essential in the performance, but the proximity of other dancers on the same dancefloor to the overflows allows them to absorb the lessons learned – such knowledge becomes structural within the ecosystem. In this sense the felicitous conditions in an ecosystem are diachronically enhanced. Indeed, such overflows may have intertemporal effects, in that the overflow, whilst infelicitous in the present, might be

asynchronously felicitous in the future. Even when the dancers step from the stage, those who retain knowledge of the overflow due their proximity to the event may call on that knowledge in the future. In time, knowledge of these overflows becomes part of the rhythms of the ecosystems and is a further means of entrepreneurial attunement.

The challenge then is for the dancers to remain separate entities, but with a polyphonic voice, maintaining sufficient cognitive distance to generate new knowledge, but not so distant as to preclude the sharing of existing knowledge or to learn from overflows. Diversity is an important condition for creativity in organizations (Amabile, 1998; Amabile & Khairi, 2008), and thus it helps if the dance floor contains people with a diversity of expertise and backgrounds. The dance floor is a heterotopia (Hjorth, 2005) – a space where diversity comes about across firm and industry/sector boundaries through the sharing of ideas, knowledge, expertise, and opportunities (Miles, Miles, & Snow, 2005; Pattinson, Preece, & Dawson, 2016). The challenge for the leaders of the dance is to bring together disparate groups of individuals facing common problems (Ramirez & Li, 2009). In this sense the dancers are a collective of diverse influences involved in co-creativity, where achieving a state of becoming (Steyaert, 2007) is necessary in order to move the focus to the *social* of the creative processes.

Diversity tends to create conflict and convoluted processes, and therefore it may be tempting for some managers to put together homogeneous groups of individual dancers whose success depends on both their internal stability and their capacity to develop behavioural norms and protocols to stimulate creativity (McKinlay, 2002). This raises an important question regarding how organizations manage the constant change of dance partners, which we now explore.

## **But don't cramp my style!**

Constant communication between the dancers is required in order to have a creative dialogue rather than a merged couple performance. Thus, the tension between dancers has an important role here in allowing for and building upon multiple perspectives. Research on organizational entrepreneurship has shown the benefits of working with polyphonic spaces in the context of effectuation processes (Alexandersson, 2015; Hjorth & Steyaert, 2004). Only as distinct entities can the dancers reveal the potential of each movement and produce unexpected outcomes. A recent adaptation of the Tango metaphor is to point out that it does not take two, but actually three (or sometimes more) to Tango (See, for example, Buch, Dysvik, Kuvaas, & Nerstad, 2015; Greiner, 2002). Gaudet (2013, p. 178) points out that “in the heat of Tango, multiple dancing partners...mobilize” in effectual processes. Gaudet (2013) does not discuss, however, how we might use this observation to help develop a '3 (+) dancers' metaphor. Although the Tango is usually a dance between two partners, the effectuation processes of organizations are largely dependent on the interaction and intertemporal creative tension that emerges among multiple partners (as well as multiple leaders), both inside and outside the firm (Pisano, 2006). The Argentine Tango metaphor is valuable here because it allows us to consider the multiple interactions of diverse individuals occurring on a ‘dance floor’, where the dancers are so focused on their individual dance partner that they might fail to recognize or take into account the wider contexts within which this action is occurring, and which might challenge or enhance their effectiveness.

We must also consider that dances might end. Partners, for reasons of creative tension may leave the partnership and find new partners, a partner may leave the dance floor in favour of a

venue with a more conducive rhythm, or indeed partners may become one single entity. As such, matters such as geographic relocation, merger, acquisition and venture dissolution may be better understood by considering the process of becoming in the dance.

### **Final flourish**

The central research question explored in this paper has been; *how can the Argentine Tango metaphor enhance our understanding of the performativity of effectuation processes?* Using both performativity and metaphor, the paper has offered a challenge to the underlying assumptions body of work discussing entrepreneurial opportunities. Through this problematization approach, the paper has made a more fine-grained contribution to the effectuation school of thought. The contribution builds on criticisms of effectuation as lacking a fine grained understanding of its emergence. With resort to the metaphor of the Argentine Tango we have been able to offer new concepts into the discussion of effectuation such as contextual rhythms, attunement and promiscuity – which if empirically explored may offer further insight into the motion and flow of effectuation processes. By combining ideas from performativity with a metaphorical lens we have also contributed to the visualization of effectuation as a spontaneous, improvisational and serendipitous processes of constitution, de-constitution and re-constitution of relations conducted in a felicitous context. By offering, reversals, re-starts, changes of direction, collisions as being infelicitous overflows but which may be intertemporally felicitous, we have offered a way of understanding acceptable losses from an emergent perspective. The consideration of the dancer and the dancefloor we have offered a means to moderate the tension between spontaneity and structural context. In sum, our contribution offers a challenge to static and individualistic views of entrepreneurial

opportunity recognition underpinned by realist ontological foundations. Our contribution also offers a route to gaining insight into uncertainty as the very basis of boundary setting conditions.

Whilst the analogy between entrepreneurship and the Tango is not new, the metaphor itself has not been systematically applied to empirical analyses to effectuation processes, nor has it been conceptually developed as a research framework. We have shown how the specific metaphor of the ‘Argentine’ Tango acts as a rhetorical device that helps us explore entrepreneurial effectuation process as ‘becoming’. Our view is that, in considering the Argentine Tango metaphor, we draw attention to micro-level insights that can be particularly useful when analysing situations where diverse perspectives and complex networks of ecosystems of multiple partners work together. Such consideration is also heuristic (Gagnon, 2008) and could aid the exploration of creative dialectic tensions in a variety of organizational settings. This process contributes to the construction of multiple perspectives and supports the capture of the polyphonic voice of collective endeavour in which tension between various entrepreneurs encourages effectual process. Consideration of the Argentine Tango metaphor has allowed us to propose the following research agenda to enhance the performativity of effectuation.

### **Save the next dance**

We propose the following agenda for empirical study of the ideas advanced in this conceptual paper.

First, to more fully understand effectuation as an act of becoming, we should study the activities of entrepreneurs in context as a series of micro-level movement's – as 'intimate steps' in the dance. This would seem to require longitudinal, real time study in the manner of a panel of judges immediately adjacent to the dance floor observing the intricacy of the moves of the dancers as they unfold. Case analysis and eventual cross-case analysis may therefore lead to transferable performative theory of effectuation. Its product would be a series of micro-level steps or moves that could be taken towards enhanced creativity.

With such processual intent in mind, we propose further that, second; the notion of 'contextual rhythms' should be considered in order to better understand the link between entrepreneurial person and context. Research examining the contextually bounded notion of entrepreneurial ecosystems could be furthered by addressing rhythm synchronicity in the collective flows of entrepreneurship. Given high levels of contextual specificity in different ecosystems, a 'synchronicity' approach may have far more to offer than attempts at broad generalizability in entrepreneurial ecosystem research. Such an approach could employ interpretative phenomenological analysis (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011) to explore synchronicity experiences by interviewing a purposive sample of co-located or co-interacting entrepreneurs about how they make sense of their experiences. The outcomes of this research may append itself well to the principle of dynamic capability (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). A further outcome of this approach may be to identify which rhythms work on which different dance floors, thereby holding the promise of informing the movement of entrepreneurs and ventures between different contexts.

Third, the issue of partner choice is worthy of further study. Given that entrepreneurs often favour existing networks when exploring opportunities, the concept of promiscuity between dancers and the dialogic tension between them seems an important source of further investigation and may offer an interesting contrast to a significant focus on loyalty, trust and commitment in relational interaction. The Argentine Tango metaphor seems helpful to visualize this dialogic interplay and in exploring how effectual networking unfolds.

Fourth, the core of the Tango-Argentino analogy is the closeness of interactions, changing leadership and creative tension which provide a framework for the effectuation process. Close interaction between partners allows for a dialogue to emerge without the need to develop a single integrated approach. Changing leadership provides opportunities for the partners to lead different phases of the process, rather than consider leadership as a fixed, individual or even formal hierarchical function. Creative tension describes situations of close interaction, but with the partners providing distinctively different inputs, perspectives or approaches. It allows for the creation of a new 'product' or other output from the creative tension generated by a clash of separate standpoints. Understanding the motion and flow of these interaction can surely only aid an understanding of the performativity of effectuation. We suggest that adopting a multi-level analysis approach would be appropriate to furthering the study of close interaction between individual entrepreneurs (micro), teams of entrepreneurs (meso), or at the level of the entrepreneurial ecosystem (macro). This would also enhance the study of changing leadership and creative tensions.

Fifth, given the association of effectuation theory with experienced entrepreneurs, how inexperienced entrepreneurs learn the 'contextual rhythms' that seem so essential for

effectuation to happen, particularly with the aid of experienced entrepreneurs, seems an outstanding task in understanding how causation processes ‘become’ effectual. We propose the term of ‘attunement’ as appropriate to this endeavour. Further successful study of this phenomenon might be achieved by employing cognition theory or socio-economic approaches, such as networking, or even a communities of practice framework, to explore how novice entrepreneurs become expert entrepreneurs.

Sixth, the study of distance and creativity should be studied as a process of becoming. Judges should focus on how the process of proximity and distance enhances creativity in the dance and how the motions of flow of the dancers, in tune with the rhythms lead to enhanced creativity in their dance and in the creativity of other dancers on the same dance floor. A subjunctive of this task would be study the intertemporal effects of reversals, re-starts, changes of direction, collisions and falls and how proximity allows such knowledge to be contextually retained. Visualizing this diachronicity by entrepreneurs might enhance their understanding of losses as acceptable in more than a synchronous measure.

Finally, seventh, how the process of individuality is maintained in the dance. Whilst we conceptualize the dance as a social act, there is a likelihood that as a social act, the dance becomes routinized. Whilst this routinization may be felicitous and become part of contextual attunement processes, there seems a need to further study how entrepreneurial individuality is maintained. This dialectic would seem to be captured in changes of leadership, changes of partners in the dance, etc. Equally, a study of the motions that lead to individual dancers leaving the dance floor will aid understanding of the motivations for venture dissolution. Such an understanding might lead to an appreciation of when and why dancers change their dance floors



and choose to move to learn other rhythms. Concerted micro-level study of partner choice, leadership of the dance and exit from and entry to different dancefloors relative to individual creativity seems to us to be an important endeavour and may also lead to an understanding of the degradation of entrepreneurial ecosystems, or indeed their failure to move from the embryonic.

We therefore propose seven areas where deployment of the Argentine Tango metaphor could lead to the enhanced performativity of effectuation and hope that empirical study of the dance will commence.

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