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February 26, 2009

Dr. Joep Cornelissen
The University of Leeds
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Dear Dr. Cornelissen:

The reviews of your manuscript submitted to *Academy of Management Review*, "Making Sense of New Ventures: Analogical and Metaphorical Reasoning and the Discursive Creation and Justification of New Ventures" (AMR 08-442) are now complete. I cannot accept this version of the manuscript but encourage you to submit a substantially revised version for further consideration. The decision was based on the attached reviews, as well as my own reading of the manuscript.

We are fortunate to have three thoughtful reviews from scholars with expertise in your topic area. All three reviewers saw value in deepening our theoretical understanding of how new ventures are created. The paper's strengths lie in its focus on bridging the gap between individual and institutional perspectives of this topic through a multilevel approach, as well as its potential to offer interesting and provocative insights about the interactions that occur.

Nonetheless, the reviewers express a number of fundamental concerns, ranging from a lack of conceptual clarity regarding main ideas and key constructs to insufficient theoretical development and original contribution. Based on my own reading of the manuscript, I agree with the assessment that the distinctive theoretical potential of the paper is significantly underdeveloped by AMR standards at this point.

In the following paragraphs, I focus on the principal issues that will need to be addressed in order for your revision to be successful.

1) Theoretical Development and Contribution

In order to publish in AMR, a paper must make a clear contribution to theory concerning important phenomena, and this contribution must significantly build on or go beyond what is available in the existing literature. Such theoretical development needs to be grounded in the appropriate assumptions with clear boundary conditions specified and consistent arguments presented. To contextualize the reviewers' concerns, let me stress that while the paper offers a number of promising ideas, the potential contribution of your work to theoretical advancement is still very much in question. As Reviewer 2 (4) states, the current manuscript does not address the critical

factors of “how your thoughts and ideas about entrepreneurs’ discursive actions are grounded in or separate from the paradigms that you evoke.”

Your reviewers outlined their concerns well in their comments, so I will not elaborate on each again here. Suffice it to say that we’re looking for a much tighter argumentation and compelling logic than currently developed. To accomplish this, you need to address the following interrelated issues:

1. Present a much more compelling and clear depiction of the agentic and institutional approaches to entrepreneurship. See Reviewer 3 (1) and Reviewer 2 (5).
2. Develop your model with regard to the theoretical underpinnings of metaphorical and analogical reasoning, and push your thinking on how your model ‘covers the ground’ between the individual and institutional levels.
 - a) Reviewer 3 (2) expresses significant concerns about theoretical positioning and contribution at a broad level, and Reviewer 2 (6, 10) also raises important questions to consider.
 - b) Based on my reading, I share concerns about whether this is truly a ‘process theory,’ and encourage you to pay attention to issues raised by the reviewers regarding interaction processes. See Reviewer 2 (7, 13-15) and Reviewer 1 (3, 10). On a related note, these reviewers raise specific questions about your assumptions regarding ‘sensemaking’ that require rigorous thought and consideration.

2) Conceptualization and Definitions of Key Constructs

A hallmark of good theory is clear construct definition, and then very consistent use of the terminology defined. The manuscript suffers considerably from the lack of a clear conceptualization and definition of its main ideas and key constructs.

Therefore, in the revision, the description and use of concepts needs to be much clearer and tighter. Reviewers 2 (9) and Reviewer 3 (3) articulate important issues regarding the presentation of key concepts and the use of specialized jargon. In addition, the manuscript will benefit from efforts to streamline its message, for it is wordy and redundant in several places, and can be confusing. For example, lack of clarity about what you mean by ‘new ventures’ raises reviewer questions that can be addressed through more concise and straightforward writing.

3) Research Implications and contribution to future learning

One of the requirements for publication in AMR is the identification of a strong research agenda that can guide future theoretical development and/or empirical studies in a topic area. Specific propositions are neither required nor encouraged unless you are building a formal model derived from a set of axioms, but your paper should establish a set of clear and coherent ideas that can extend directly into research by other scholars. In its current form, the paper is weak in terms of its implications. As Reviewer 1 (2) and Reviewer 3 (5) suggest, the paper should offer a cogent articulation of its contribution to research.

As you can see, successfully addressing the reviewers’ concerns will require a great deal of effort and a considerable amount of risk. However, I do encourage you to try to address these concerns, as we all like the basic idea of what you are trying to do. The reviewers and I provide a number of things to consider, but I do believe that the nature and relatedness of these issues offer potential for a successful revision. For example, one outcome of addressing the issues above will be to allay the

concerns that Reviewer 1(8 & 9) raises, and I share, regarding the table and the introduction of the “scene-encoding” hypothesis.

Resubmission Instructions

Assuming that you indeed decide to revise your manuscript, please log into <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/amr> and enter your Author Center, where you will find your manuscript title listed under “Manuscripts with Decisions.” Under “Actions,” click on “Create a Revision.” Your manuscript number will have been modified to denote a revision. You will be unable to make your revisions on the originally submitted version of the manuscript. Instead, revise your manuscript using a word processing program and save it on your computer. Once the revised manuscript is prepared, you can upload it and submit it through your Author Center. *IMPORTANT: Your original files are available to you when you upload your revised manuscript. Please delete any redundant files before completing the submission.*

As you revise your manuscript, please consider each reviewer comment carefully, since even relatively minor comments can sometimes trigger large improvements in a manuscript. In revising your manuscript, please carefully consider each reviewer comment and pay particular attention to the points mentioned in this decision letter. We ask that you deal with all issues raised by the reviewers and the action editor while revising your manuscript and that you provide point-by-point responses to explain how you have done so. We believe that having you explicitly respond to all the issues raised by the reviewers and action editor puts you in the best possible position to achieve a favorable outcome. However, *concisely* explaining the actions you have taken is desirable in that such explanations save reviewers’ time while ensuring that your responses highlight the actions you have taken to deal with their concerns. The type of responses we are requesting from you means that extended discussions of tangential issues should be avoided as should reproductions of large blocks of text from the paper within the responses document. While not imposing a page limit for the responses, it’s a good rule of thumb that the responses should not be longer than the manuscript! To this end, if the same point is raised by the action editor and/or one or more reviewers, you should provide a detailed response only once and then refer the other readers (i.e., the action editor and/or the reviewers) to the initial response you provided regarding a particular (and commonly-shared) issue or concern. *Please note that the responses to reviewers’ document should appear at the end of the revised manuscript beginning on a separate page.*

Because we are trying to facilitate timely revision of manuscripts submitted to AMR, please upload your revised manuscript within 4 months of today or contact me in advance to negotiate an alternative deadline.

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to AMR and I look forward to receiving your revision.

Warm regards,



Adelaide W. King
Associate Editor
Academy of Management Review

Comments from Reviewer 1:

I appreciate the work and effort that went into this study, and I find the topic of great interest. I think that there is an important contribution in this line of work. However, I am a reviewer after all, so I have a number of observations to make. While I'm optimistic, I can't say with certainty whether or how the ultimate outcome of the manuscript might make a contribution. I have detailed my concerns below.

1. I really like this paper, and it explains a lot of what is commonly observed about how ventures are created but does so in a new and (I think) more viable way. I fully agree with the author(s) that the existing literature is either overwhelmingly agentic (i.e., the entrepreneur is everything) or overwhelmingly institutional (i.e., the entrepreneur is nothing), so the multilevel and interactive approach taken here is certainly welcome.
2. I have struggled to understand how the paper will be used by subsequent researchers. Much of its approach is very straightforward (though I have some concerns about the theory too, as I'll outline below). I wondered what kinds of empirical work this study might initiate?
3. Now for some more substantive concerns. First the statement "sense is 'created' or 'made' . . . in and through language and is not preceded by conscious internal cognitive processing" (page 9). When I read this I wondered why you included such a drastic statement. You may disagree with me, but I do not think (1) this statement is necessary, and (2) that this statement can be substantiated. I have absolutely no doubt that "conscious internal cognitive processing" *frequently* precedes language, and it certainly does in the context of an entrepreneurial idea. I think (from my own experience) that there is a constant interplay between "conscious internal cognitive processing" and the language I use to describe my own ventures. Putting a venture into words is one more way of experiencing the venture. Making drawings of it is another – nothing to do with language, but it is expressing the idea in a visual way. The idea is certainly and clearly impacted by language, but please don't try to convince me that venture ideas arise only through expression in language and without any prior internal cognitive processing. When you make statements like this you remind me of B.F. Skinner, and though you clearly aren't behaviorists dogmatic statements like this convince me that you may be more committed to the dogma than to better understanding. By the way, the statement following the offensive one "language is best thought of, accordingly, not at the packaged communicative output of a 'internal' cognitive process" is fine with me. Again, however, I think in the context of entrepreneurship the process is iterative, and don't think the assertion that internal cognitive processing is irrelevant or peripheral is necessary for your study.
4. You refer to the liability of "being too bold", citing Aldrich and Fiol, 1994 (which is not in the references) and note the "development of a new venture without an adequate (inductive) basis for making predictions and inferences about the feasibility of the venture" (page 14-15). I'm quite unconvinced about any judgments that you might make about the adequacy of any inductive basis for predictions and inferences. Let's be clear here. There is tremendous uncertainty surrounding new ventures, some of it known and knowable and some of it unknowable. Because a venture failed does not, to me, indicate that there was *an inadequate basis for making predictions*. In fact, the basis for predictions is what it is. Don't try to argue that when a venture fails it was inadequate to begin with. I can think of many instances in which that is not correct. Your entire language-based approach seems to philosophically support my assertion here.

5. You have a sentence fragment at the bottom of page 19.
6. I'm a little surprised that you weren't more specific about some of the uses of metaphor and analogy. You seem to be firmly grounded in experience and institutionalized industries. However, there is also the issue of perceptions or beliefs about demand – also an institutionalized phenomenon, but perhaps not linked to an existing, institutionalized industry. For example, there currently appears to be very strong demand for green technologies, such as solar and wind, and the fact that the belief in strong demand is so widespread and strong helps legitimate all manner of ventures in that arena (think dot-com). So, it goes beyond metaphorically linking the new venture to some existing ventures or industries, though I agree that your approach is the more frequent.
7. On page 24, first full paragraph, you seem to take a sharp normative turn. Is that intentional? I hope not. Please revise that paragraph so that it is much less “should do” and more “will do”.
8. I think that the material in Table 1 needs to be woven into the text. As is, you leave it to the reader to work out all the details reported in the table. You need to do this without making the paper any longer too. At the very least, link the material in the table closer to what is in the text.
9. I must tell you that I was a bit shocked to see the “scene encoding hypothesis” which you report on page 27. This prediction simply fell out of thin air, and I still can't justify its existence after 3 reads of the paper. All of your material leading up to the prediction is about how new ventures will be justified, and about the interaction between entrepreneur and existing institutional context. Then you make a prediction about the persistence of the initial scene! Where did that come from? What in the prior sections can you use to justify the persistence of the initial scene?
10. In fact, one of my big concerns is for that scene encoding hypothesis. In my experience, the scene is quite fluid early on, and can change dramatically in the process of development. Some of the change takes place when you try to explain the venture to others, and some of it changes (as I noted earlier) when you try to illustrate the venture with drawings, or when you try to make a physical prototype. One way to help build this into your paper is the issue of milestones. I think milestones play a critical role in the evolutionary process you're describing. First, milestones arise because significant agreement arises among the parties to the venture regarding where the key uncertainties lie and how to resolve them. Milestones provide a natural location for the elaboration of a venture, because they resolve significant uncertainties and point the venture in new directions (or reinforce the current direction). Your discussion of coasting captures well a venture in-between milestones, and milestones play a key role in the thickening of the scenes. For these reasons, I think milestones should be an important part of your theory section.
11. Generally speaking, the paper is long for its contribution. I would work on sharpening the arguments and reducing the paper's length.

You've made a great start here, and I hope my comments help you along. Regardless of the outcome, I wish you good luck as you continue this interesting research.

Comments from Reviewer 2: *(AE note: Please note that I added paragraph numbers to this Reviewer's feedback to make it easier to point to particularly comments.)*

I enjoyed reading your work and hope to help you develop its contributions to organization science with the following comments. While the overall impression is positive, there are a number of issues that I think need to be addressed.

- par. 1) I see an imbalance across the paper that might arise from your effort to introduce a new theoretical position (discursive sensemaking) and develop a new theory (analogical and metaphorical sources, developments and consequences for discursive sensemaking around venture creation in new industries) to entrepreneurship studies. One alone can fill a book, both at the same time have you divide your attention to the detriment of their integration, I think.
- par. 2) But let me summarize first: You suggest in your paper that the success of venture creation in new industries depends substantially on the prospective entrepreneur invoking analogies or metaphors in a discursive fashion. If this is done successfully, it might then allow for further thickening, coasting or tuning of the entrepreneurial narrative, depending on the circumstances and the development of the venture. The process of developing the entrepreneurial narrative is dependent on prior experiences of the entrepreneur and the effectance motivation.
- par. 3) You place your work between cognitive and institutional approaches, without over-emphasizing either one is interesting. I take this to mean that you are placing yourself into the tradition of thought that takes a mutual constitution of actor and resource as its starting point? The work of Bourdieu and Giddens in particular have inspired a number of studies in this area, from the practice turn to studies of discourse. Conceptually you seem closer to the second, while not taking into account how exactly discourse might reproduce or change institutions. Your language supposes an "actor-first" position, with the entrepreneur as the sensemaking and sensegiving individual. It places you closer to the cognitive approach than to the institutional.
- par. 4) As I am trying to understand where your theoretical position, I understand that choosing sensemaking as a base makes sense in this context, as Weick at least also talks about a mutual constitution of actor and environment. Inductive reasoning fits as well. And yet, it needs some more work. Maybe I need to learn more about how Edwards (whom I admittedly don't know very well) fits into the global picture. Otherwise, the positioning of your paper appears as too global. It kept me wondering continuously how your thoughts and ideas about entrepreneurs' discursive actions are grounded in or separate from the paradigms that you evoke.
- par. 5) For example, your referencing on page 2, line 12 goes like this "discursive sensemaking theory (e.g., Edwards, 1997)." This has me asking: who else? You suggest that you like to go in between cognition science and institutionalism. Therefore you would need to explain very clear what this position is vis-à-vis the other two and in itself before you continue to delve into the analogical and metaphorical.
- par. 6) Without continuous checking towards the ontological base, an epistemological problem arises. Theories of mutual constitution are supposed to be hermeneutically informed. You are invoking interpretivism at various places, however, you don't come right through to it and go back to positions of objectified scripts in your proposals. This leaves us at least potentially with a mixed ontology. This becomes visible, for example, in the near absence of narrative theory in your text, while you do invoke the entrepreneurial narrative at several occasions (page 6, line 30). But what is

an entrepreneurial narrative? How might it be explained in terms of narrative theory? What story elements does it have apart from analogical and metaphorical inputs. How is it told, in what ordering, or what fashion? Is all narrative theory blind to the thickening, coasting and tuning that you propose?

- par. 7) On this ground, you propose to push through to a process theory, but there is little of process discussed here. It might again be a reflection of the ontological uncertainty surrounding the core argument. On page 34 you write “the very process by which entrepreneurs ‘move beyond their existing knowledge to produce novel creations.’” But what is this process? What does it look like? Your proposals don’t have a process character to it. Is it process in the tradition of Van de Ven and Poole (1995) or following the more recent ideas of Tsoukas and Chia (2002)?
- par. 8) Your basic concepts need explaining as well as your position in the current academic discourse. To reject two positions (actor-focus and social context-focus) does not alone build enough of a foundation. Especially, if it seems that you find your way back to an actor-focus along the paper. How discursive sensemaking covers the middle ground needs to be explained.
- par. 9) Discourse, narrative, process, sensemaking, analogues...there are a lot of concepts that are only cursory introduced. They don’t form a coherent picture by themselves, yet. What kind of discourse as opposed to alternative explanations of it, what kind of narrative genre thinking, what kind of sensemaking theory (say more about what it is, rather than what it isn’t), what kind of process thinking, etc. I kept asking myself, and other readers might do the same.
- par. 10) Another thing that kept me wondering was your treatment of analogy and metaphor. To equate analogy to prior experience and metaphor to Lakoffian idea of embodied metaphor seems limiting. It closes the doors towards more generative uses of analogies and metaphors. Your observations, as plausible as they are in the light of what entrepreneurs say, think and do, need to be explained on the basis of existing theory about the functioning of analogies and metaphors. Again I am thinking of the interpretative aspects here, which seem to be a bit ignored in favor of studies that take analogies as objectified entities. For example, I wonder how metaphors and analogies might be understood from the point of debate between Tsoukas (1993) and Cornellissen (2005). Both wonder how properties between source and target domain are transferred or negotiated. Tsoukas describes a faithful mapping process, while Cornellissen describes a model that allows for creative adaption. Which one would it be for the case of venture creation? And how? The adoption of an analogy or metaphor as you describe it is very “clean.” I encourage you to get into the messy part of this, which will likely bring you closer to process and closer to a more differentiated view.
- par. 11) As a smaller issue: On page 3 you write that “before a novel venture can institutionalize and persist, the venture must make sense.” From a sensemaking perspective and the reliance on analogies and metaphors, such an A-follows-B is not very convincing. At other occasion you describe it as a simultaneous process: Institutionalization and persistence are interwoven with ongoing sensemaking. Or isn’t it? Please clarify.
- par. 12) Another smaller issue: There is a clear focus of your work on revolutionary or innovative ventures. Your writing doesn’t seem to care for the vast majority of ventures that are based on “me-too” concepts in known markets/industries. Maybe make this clear at the very beginning of the paper and take it up into the title as well. It took me until page 4, line 44 to finally get it. Other readers might be similarly slow. Maybe develop the case for innovative ventures a bit more. What is special there, apart from the lack of foreknowledge? What are the circumstances that these

entrepreneurs face? I think that the motivation for your theoretical position lies here, rather than in ontological reasoning. Make this more explicit.

- par. 13) While the first part speaks of sensemaking for the entrepreneur and others, the view becomes increasingly outward directed and instrumental over the continuation of the paper. The entrenching and scripting is discussed mostly as a way to develop a plausible narrative, rather than as a way for the entrepreneur to find out where he or she actually is in the venture creation process. This becomes clear when you equate sensemaking and sensegiving. These two might truly be happening at the same time during venture creation, but how are they interrelated? Your account only talks about making sense in the service of venture creation. The relationship between sensemaking and sensegiving in discursive sensemaking can deliver some surprising insights I believe, especially if related to the thickening, coasting and tuning of the narratives. This might complexify the picture, but I think that it might be worthwhile. It might lead you to more circular reasoning patterns of interrelatedness rather than the A-allows-for-or-necessitates-B way in which you describe thickening, coasting and tuning in the present version of your paper.
- par. 14) Let me explain what I mean a bit more. If an entrepreneur takes to an analogy or metaphor to attract legitimacy and support for the venture creation (sensegiving?) and uses the same analogy or metaphor to make sense of what he or she is actually doing there, then the main focus is on representing a venture in attractive terms. This doesn't leave space for play with metaphors or analogies. Or for usage of analogies to explore and imagine and to dream of where it might else go. Questions of "what if" and "what else" are not invited.
- par. 15) Also, the relationship between sensegiving and sensemaking might invite others to give feedback and to think-along, thus co-creating the venture with the entrepreneur. In short, the use of analogues and metaphors as portrayed in the paper is instrumental, not playful or creativity inspiring. However, explaining the creative effort of entrepreneurs has been a purpose of your paper (page 7). When taken like this, you are falling back upon a position that you wanted to abandon in the beginning.
- par. 16) I read between the lines (this might be my personal bias) that the analogies and metaphors have further reaching consequences than only providing a descriptor for something that is novel and unfamiliar to people.
- par. 17) I understand your eagerness to tell the reader about the role of analogy and metaphor for discursive sensemaking in venture creation in new industries, but I encourage you to rest for a while longer with the foundations of your paper. First develop the theoretical position in greater detail (which would include a balanced discussion of sensemaking theory and theory on analogical reasoning) and only then take us on a tour towards what entrepreneurs think, say and do. My hope is that if you pay more attention to the interrelatedness of the concepts in your theoretical position, you will find out more and tell us more about how entrepreneurs might develop and invite creativity around their central entrepreneurial narrative.
- par. 18) I don't quite know if it fits your theoretical "gusto," but it might prove helpful for you to have a look at the work of DeCerteau (1984).

H Tsoukas. *Analogical Reasoning and Knowledge Generation in Organization Theory - Organization Studies*, 1993

H Tsoukas, R Chia. *On Organizational Becoming* - *Organization Science*, 2002

JP Corneliissen. BEYOND COMPARE: METAPHOR IN ORGANIZATION THEORY - The Academy of Management Review, 2005

Michel De Certeau. The Practice of Everyday Life. Translated by Steven Rendall. University of California Press. 1984.

AH Van de Ven, MS Poole. Explaining Development and Change in Organizations - ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT REVIEW, 1995

Comments from Reviewer 3:

This submission is quite ambitious, and I applaud the author/s' ambition. Further, I am sympathetic with the basic direction the paper is taking. Yet the exposition and argument contained therein have a number of weaknesses that should be rectified in order for the paper to have impact. My biggest concerns have to do with exposition, and they are fairly major concerns. Below, I offer some comments and suggestions that I hope will help the authors as they continue this line of research.

1. The paper is framed against two predominant approaches to entrepreneurship, the cognitive and the institutional approach. Most AMR readers are presumably familiar the gist of the ideas that characterize these two approaches. However, given the centrality of these two approaches to the way the submission is structured, I recommend the author/s to lay them out more clearly and in more depth. The reader should get a quick and clear sense of what these two approaches are about, their core ideas, and their core assumptions.

More specifically, if the author/s had to write a model that captures the essence of these two approaches, what would this model look like? Absent a parsimonious representation of the reference points against which the paper departs, it is hard to assess the paper's actual contribution.

Also, what is the evidence these approaches are built on? For instance, concerning the cognitive approach, what is the evidence that underlies the "model of man" this tradition builds on? The opportunities for improvement here are big.

2. Concerning the paper's main theoretical contribution, the keyword here is "strip it down." Similar to my prior comment, I would like to see a simple, parsimonious representation of what the main argument of the paper is about. After reading it a few times, I think I was able to grasp it, but it wasn't easy. In fact, even now I have a hard time assessing the true contribution of the paper. Absent a clear representation of the basic idea or theoretical proposal, it is extremely hard to grasp both the basic idea and the nuances / elaborations the author/s aim to offer. A simple way to solve the problem could be to present a model of the basic theoretical proposal at first. My own bias would be to start with clear cognitive foundations. What is the "model of mind" that underlies the discursive sensemaking approach? Can the author/s articulate it upfront? What empirical (experimental or field-based) evidence supports it? How does such model compare to the implicit or explicit assumptions that are made in the cognitive and institutional perspectives the author/s criticize? This would give the reader a chance to get familiar with the basic theoretical underpinnings of the present contribution. Then the author/s can elaborate it, identify boundary conditions, possible extensions, and speculate about limitations. But this should be done in an orderly fashion, starting with a simple representation at first.

Also, the elaborations, in my opinion, should be introduced more carefully and clearly. For instance, I found the introduction of the key processes of thickening, coasting, etc. to be really interesting. But these processes are introduced almost in passing. I would have spent way more time carefully defining them, and especially offering a structured way of thinking about when they are likely to be used.

3. This problem is exacerbated by the heavy use of specialized jargon that most AMR readers might not be familiar with. I am familiar with most of this literature and I contribute to parts of it. Thus, I didn't have major problems with the jargon used. But I suspect most readers would. Do the author/s think that most readers are familiar with what "effectance motivation" or "embodiment hypothesis" mean? Based on how they use them, it looks like they assume this is common parlance. But it isn't.

4. Relatedly, given the likely unfamiliarity of most readers with a lot of this material and jargon, I believe that using more examples would be extremely helpful. If I had to write a paper like this, I would select just one or two strong examples, and I would use them throughout the paper. I would like an example that can display both the theoretical reference points against which the paper is built, their limitations, and the need for the approach the author/s advocate.

5. Based on their theoretical push, I was expecting the author/s to conclude the paper by deriving a series of specific predictions and compare them with whatever predictions might emerge from the alternative approaches they depart from. The author/s claim their argument leads to new predictions, briefly mention what these new predictions might look like, but do not really derive them in a systematic way. I think they should. To the extent their approach truly sheds new light on the phenomena of interest, the reader (or at least this reader) wants to see them clearly, especially how they change our understanding of the focal phenomena.