

**Behind the Scenes of Technology Entrepreneurship in Kenya:  
A Rich Microcosm for Contextualizing and Advancing Global Organization Studies**

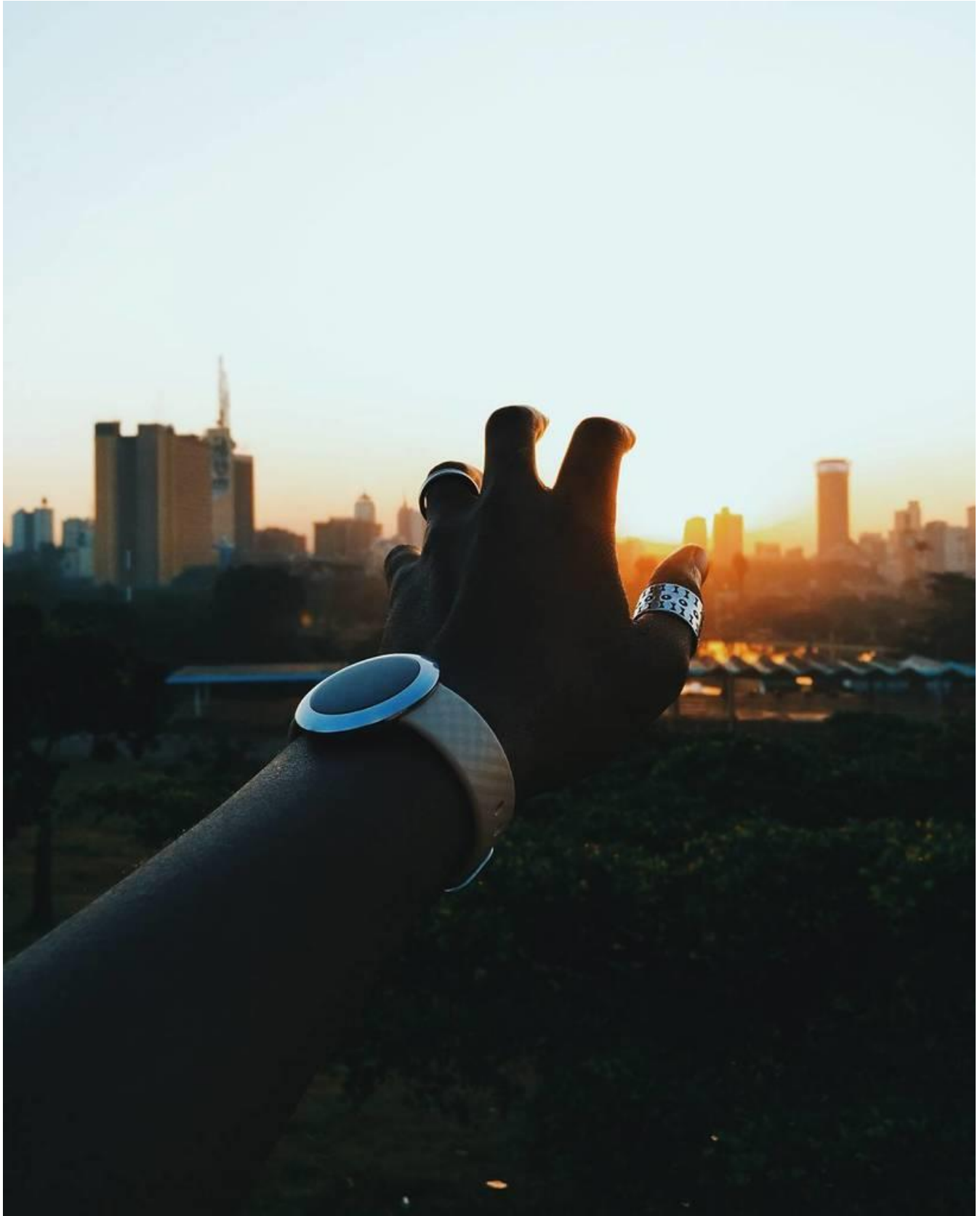
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*Wie jede Blühte welkt und jede Jugend  
Dem Alter weicht, blüht jede Lebensstufe,  
Blüht jede Weisheit auch und jede Tugend  
Zu ihrer Zeit und darf nicht ewig dauern.*

*Es muß das Herz bei jedem Lebensrufe  
Bereit zum Abschied sein und Neubeginne,  
Um sich in Tapferkeit und ohne Trauern  
In andre, neue Bindungen zu geben.  
Und jedem Anfang wohnt ein Zauber inne,  
Der uns beschützt und der uns hilft, zu leben.*

*Wir sollen heiter Raum um Raum durchschreiten,  
An keinem wie an einer Heimat hängen,  
Der Weltgeist will nicht fesseln uns und engen,  
Er will uns Stuf' um Stufe heben, weiten.  
Kaum sind wir heimisch einem Lebenskreise  
Und traulich eingewohnt, so droht Erschlaffen,  
Nur wer bereit zu Aufbruch ist und Reise,  
Mag lähmender Gewöhnung sich entrafen.*

*Es wird vielleicht auch noch die Todesstunde  
Uns neuen Räumen jung entgegenschenden,  
Des Lebens Ruf an uns wird niemals enden ...  
Wohlan denn, Herz, nimm Abschied und gesunde!*

„Stufen“ von Hermann Hesse (1941)

Dedicated to Inge Wachholz and Axel Weiser

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## **Abstract**

Technology entrepreneurship is on the rise around the world. In the quest for change, comparative advantage, innovation creation and socioeconomic progress, a turn to entrepreneurial solutions to persistent developmental challenges has provided a powerful and captivating alternative to past solution approaches. As a consequence, innovation clusters have mushroomed, and an enthusiasm for entrepreneurial activity has caught the attention of many in localities as diverse as Kenya’s Silicon Savannah, Nigeria’s Yabacoon Valley, South Africa’s Silicon Cape, Chile’s Chilecon Valley and Germany’s Silicon Allee, to mention just a few. Yet despite this new, vibrant entrepreneurial activity that continuous to nourish a global wave of excitement, we know little about how technology entrepreneurship is actually performed in these disparate places. This doctoral thesis sought to fill this gap by taking a look “behind the scenes” of one of the most prominent innovation clusters in Africa — Kenya’s information and communications technology (ICT) sector. In this empirical setting, industry participants were in

the midst of actively negotiating and rationalizing how technology entrepreneurship needs to work to make it a success, to unlock the benefits of a knowledge economy for Kenya and to carve out a space in the global innovation landscape for innovations made in Africa. Three interconnected academic papers form the core of this thesis. The first paper provides a detailed illustration of the local and global prescriptions that influence entrepreneurial action in Kenya's ICT sector and inspired the conceptualization of a dynamic process model of globalization. The second paper offers a fine-grained view into the work realities of Kenyans and the generation of the multidimensional work portfolios across which workers diversify their activities to achieve economic survival, create wealth and exert agency for change. The third paper is a theoretical piece that theorizes the process of nonnative organizational forms diffusing and becoming adopted in new organizational environments. All in all, the thesis can be seen as an attempt to study the complexities that reign in African economies through an organizational lens and thus to foster a global organizational scholarship research agenda and discourse that can be of benefit to the many rather than just the few.

# **1. Introduction, Motivation and a Leap into the Future**

## **1.1. Overview**

Two recent developments formed the starting point for this doctoral thesis and prompted my empirical investigation into Kenya's dynamic technology entrepreneurship scene. The first concerns the emergence of an optimistic narrative about "Africa"<sup>1</sup> as represented by such catchphrases as "Africa Rising," "Afro-optimism" and the "Afro-moment." The narrative breaks away from prevailing conceptions of Africa and was in part nourished by a remarkable wave of enthusiasm across the African continent for entrepreneurial solutions to long-standing socioeconomic problems. The second development concerns a shift in management and

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Africa" is put here in quotation marks to recognize and follow the academic leadership of other scholars in the field (Nkomo, 2011) who have pointed out that the idea of "Africa" was an invention of the Global North (Mudimbe, 1994) tying back to Africa's colonial history, in the sense that "the shock of colonialism and imperialism had awakened Africans to the fact that in relation to the Western oppressors, Africans were one" (Mazrui, 1993). The term is thus conceptually, though not literally, placed in quotation marks throughout this doctoral thesis.

organization studies that has been pushing scholars to investigate “new” phenomena outside of the Global North in order to contextualize, test, further refine and, if possible, develop new theories.

Taken together, these two developments have created a unique space of opportunity for new research and thus significantly affected the choice of the empirical setting and academic conversations that this doctoral thesis entered and seeks to contribute to. In more detail, Kenya’s information and communications technology (ICT) sector is one of the most prominent stages on which vibrant entrepreneurial activity is currently taking place in Africa. Understanding the contemporary changes that nourish the highly visible Africa-rising narrative prompted an analytical look “behind the scenes” to investigate the dynamics of this new, alternative path to socioeconomic development as it has been unfolding in Kenya. Further, the recent attention shift and resulting openness in management and organization studies favored the application of an organizational lens in studying Kenya’s ICT sector and thus led to the making of an intellectual contribution to management and organization studies as the preferred choice over other academic disciplines. In fact, Kenya’s ICT sector turned out to be a rich microcosm for new research ideas, theory development and ultimately the advancement of global organizational scholarship. The organizational lens also proved to be an insightful complementary perspective to that of other academic disciplines in the social sciences in studying and comprehending phenomena in Africa. In fact, it was instrumental in uncovering previously hidden aspects of the complexities that reign in Africa’s economic realities.

The final result? The research endeavor produced three separate albeit connected academic papers and also spurred the conceptualization and publication of an edited volume — a byproduct to this thesis (the “+1”). It represents a sincere attempt to demonstrate the generative power of research outside of well-researched domains in order to feed into a global research

agenda in organization studies and hence to deliver, it is hoped, a meaningful and impactful contribution toward actionable knowledge for change makers and agendas for future research.

In the subsequent sections of this introduction, I will depict the contours of the Africa-rising narrative as it has been taking shape and provide additional contextual information about Kenya and its ICT sector as well as describe the use of an organizational lens to study the sector in more detail. I also want to take the opportunity that this introduction affords to dive a little deeper into the motivation, positioning and implications of each of the three papers' contributions — an exploration behind the scenes of dissertation writing, as it were — because these tend to receive only limited appreciation in the conventional paper format, given the narrower focus enforced by journals, and also to weave in the book publication as an important byproduct of the thesis. After all, the academic papers underlying the thesis and the book publication create a single, interconnected intellectual-product portfolio. I will also offer an outlook for future research and outline new research topics that are a direct result of my research activities over the past years. Finally, after the introduction, all three academic papers — the core of this dissertation thesis — will be offered in the form in which they were submitted to three different journals.

### **1.1.1. Setting the scene: Africa Rising!?**

Over the past decade, a new narrative about Africa as being mainly nourished by private-sector actors has emerged. It celebrates African economies for their economic vibrancy, their compelling and unexploited business opportunities and their projected economic growth rates (McKinsey, 2010; The Economist, 2013a). Key publications have provided a vivid illustration of the narrative, with titles such as “Lions on the move: The progress and potential of African economies” (McKinsey, 2010), “Lions go digital: The Internet’s transformative potential in



Africa” (McKinsey Global Institute, 2013), “Africa Rising: A hopeful continent” (The Economist, 2013a) and *The next Africa* (Bright & Hruby, 2015).

This turn to “Afro-optimism” in the discourse on Africa’s position in the world economy seeks to shake off the pessimistic image of the “hopeless continent” that dominated for decades (The Economist, 2000). It was constructed in part as a counter narrative to the international-development-aid discourse of dependency, coercion, state inefficiency, failure and intractable poverty (Moyo, 2009; Ngare, 2015). It was also infused with highly fashionable and visible themes of entrepreneurship, innovation and technology (The Economist, 2015) that embody new, self-authored futures of autonomy, aspiration, creation and rapid socioeconomic progress for the continent’s many rather than just its few (Elumelu, 2011). In particular, “African entrepreneurs” (Financial Times, 2015) have moved into the limelight (Dolan, 2015), trading places with governments, aid agencies and multinational corporations as agents of change and progress.

In fact, a remarkable wave of entrepreneurship and organization creation has swept over the continent and is yet another visible manifestation of the Afro-optimism discourse, igniting widespread private-sector debates about the demands of Africa’s middle class (AfDB, 2011), access to private and venture capital for the rapid growth of entire industry sectors (Africa Assets & Deloitte, 2013; Collier, 2010), the most suitable organizational designs for social entrepreneurs to deliver much-needed solutions to the (rural) poor (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Hanley, Wachner, & Weiss, 2015) and the remarkable innovations and new technologies created in Africa (Avle & Weiss, 2016) as well as their global applicability.

The continent’s entrepreneurship and organization creation led the World Bank (2010), for example, to dedicate a report to these remarkable developments and to focus on one of the main economic hubs in Africa with its celebrated entrepreneurial activity: “Kenya Economic Update with a special focus on the ICT Revolution and Mobile money. Kenya at the Tipping

Point?” Not only did technology entrepreneurship advance to the forefront of the Africa-rising narrative, but it was also tied to a potential for change that seemed revolutionary and that identified Kenya’s ICT sector as a specific locality that embodied these striking changes — and their yet-to-be seen outcomes (The Economist, 2015).

Why Kenya? There are a number of factors that have turned Kenya specifically into one of the central gateways to African markets and a hotbed of innovation in Africa (Africa Research Bulletin, 2015). To mention just a few, most prominent are the largely stable and positive economic growth trajectory that the Kenyan economy is on (IMF, 2012), despite its negligible endowment of natural resources, compared with those that fuel most other African economies’ growth rates (Pilling, 2016), and the nation’s increasingly favorable environment for doing business (IFC & The World Bank, 2012). Further, Kenya’s main port, Mombasa, has historically provided an entry point and vital lifeline for the land-locked countries of the East African Community, endowing Kenya with enhanced political and economic importance for the economic and social life of Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda. Also, Kenya’s capital, Nairobi, in particular has advanced to become the central node for economic activity within the region (World Bank, 2012); it is also an important economic hub in Sub-Saharan Africa, among other increasingly significant cities, such as Accra, Lagos and Johannesburg.

However, favorable macroeconomic conditions and location advantages are not the only factors that underlie the attractiveness of Kenya. Its innovations, such as the mobile banking solution M-Pesa that deeply transformed financial transactions for the whole of the nation’s society and economy, have received immense global attention (Mbiti & David Weil, 2011; Omwansa & Sullivan, 2012). Kenya’s connection to the global fiber optic cable grid in 2009 also constituted a high-impact event. It brought costs for international connectivity down substantially, increased data transfer speeds and brought about an immediate and remarkable

spike in entrepreneurial activity, particularly in the domain of technology entrepreneurship (Ndemo & Weiss, 2016).

Vibrant entrepreneurial activity led to the creation of the central node in Kenya's ICT sector, the co-working space and incubation lab iHUB, and culminated in innumerable venture creations in, for example, financial technology, social technology, cloud computing, logistical solutions, entertainment and enterprise resource planning, each with its own innovative spin on product development. This "entrepreneurial revolution," as it is called (Ndemo & Weiss, 2016), did not happen in isolation but rather attracted investors and multi-national corporations as well as human capital from afar, creating in effect what can best be understood as a unique melting pot of global resources. The World Bank's report that more than 70,000 new jobs in Kenya's economy were due to the rapid growth in the ICT sector and its forecast of a remarkable annual sector growth of 20% further contributed to the excitement (World Bank, 2010).

These staggering developments have captured the attention of the younger generations, because technology entrepreneurship seemingly provides an alternative line of action for realizing a deep-seated desire for wealth and change creation — a desire for, in short, a prosperous future that should not be mistaken for a merely self-interested endeavor but that is also geared toward profound societal advancement (Rindova, Barry, & Ketchen, 2009; World Bank, 2010). To be sure, however, all this does not mean that other highly politicized discourses about the state of African economies have lost traction or ceased to exist or that a critical reflection of the widespread enthusiasm and whether it is able to deliver on its promises are nonexistent (see, for example, work by Onuoha, 2015; Taylor, 2015; Beresford, 2016). The depictions offered above rather demarcate a new form and context for the economic activity that is currently unfolding in Kenya's ICT sector, which actively promotes an environment for collaboratively engineering path-breaking solutions to longstanding developmental challenges

and thus fostering the creation of new, self-authored futures. These cultural dynamics become visible by going beyond directly observable “surface” manifestations of macroeconomic indicators.

In fact, a closer look at technology entrepreneurship reveals that it promotes unparalleled ideals and aspirations that fundamentally affect social and economic activity; the idea that, for example, the individual is the source both of society’s problems and of the solutions to them (Audretsch, 2007; Brandl & Bullinger, 2009; Ogbor & Avenue, 2000) as well as that collective resource mobilization despite fierce competition is key to success (Saxenian, 1994). In consequence, considerable resources are spent on creating a collaborative and interdependent entrepreneurial ecosystem with a multitude of actors (Beckman, Eisenhardt, Kotha, Meyer, & Rajagopalan, 2012; Ferrary & Granovetter, 2009) — a vibrant environment intended to incubate embryonic ideas and grow them into scalable, profitable products that enable, target and champion the “disruption” of established business practices and organizing principles in order to engineer innovative forms of economic action that, it is hoped, will alter entire industries and society at large (Beckman et al., 2012; Davis, 2016; Miscione, 2015; Mosco, 1998; OECD, 2015).

In the ascent of Kenya’s digital economy, entirely new economic relationships have emerged, both on a local and a global level, unlocking potentially impactful resource flows from near and far — be they international financial capital, skilled human resources, sought-after knowledge, state-of-the-art technological innovations or foreign organizational blueprints — that will be instrumental in transforming the inner workings of society and thus thrust yet-to-be-understood economic and deeper social dynamics onto the center stage of African societies, where they are likely to unleash major changes (World Bank, 2012).

It is here that this doctoral thesis begins its empirical investigation, by taking a candid look behind the scenes of these impressive contemporary developments as they are currently unfolding in one of Africa's most celebrated ICT sectors — Kenya's Silicon Savannah. The intention of the thesis is to assess, conceptualize and make sense of the dynamics at play, examining the impact of these new resource flows and economic exchange relationships on social and economic life in Kenya and evaluating their various outcomes. The thesis can thus be seen as a steppingstone toward future investigations and appreciations of the way business is done in Kenya and the influence foreign resource flows have on the country.

### **1.1.2. Motivating an organizational lens to analyze Kenya's ICT sector**

The gradual opening and attention shift among management and organization scholars to phenomena outside of well-researched contexts in the Global North is a recent development. My doctoral thesis not only welcomes this shift, but puts it into action by using for its investigation a distinctive phenomenological lens to study Kenya's ICT sector — with a specific analytical focus on organizing dynamics and organizations as being integral to the academic discipline of organizational sociology (Scott & Davis, 2007).

For a long time, economists, anthropologists and philosophers in particular investigated and critically reflected on phenomena and trends in Africa; from their efforts grew today's wealth of knowledge and insights in the social sciences (see, for example, work by Mudimbe, 1988; Sachs *et al.*, 2004; Collier, 2008; Banerjee and Duflo, 2012). In these investigations and reflections, the voices of management and organization scholars were largely absent, because their focus was confined exclusively to phenomena in the Global North (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2008). A recent push, however, by key scholars in the field of management and organization studies has been calling for movement beyond the established and well-researched contexts to explore new

social settings and phenomena with the aim of putting the assumptions embedded in existing theories to the test in order to refine and enhance them and of developing, if possible, new strands of theory to help revitalize the field (Bamberger & Pratt, 2010; Davis, 2015; George, Corbishley, Khayesi, Haas, & Tihanyi, 2016; Nkomo, Zoogah, & Acquah, 2015; Tsui, 2007; Walsh, 2015). The Academy of Management Africa Conference in early 2013 in Johannesburg, South Africa, and the inauguration of the *Africa Journal of Management* in 2015 have been two important steps from scholars who work on phenomena in Africa to enhance the visibility of academic work from localities outside of the Global North.

An organizational lens, arguably, can not only work alongside of and thus complement existing academic work in other disciplines, but can also be integral in creating a more holistic understanding of societal life and thus well be positioned to help engender novel, interesting and often counterintuitive findings that have remained hidden to other disciplines (Davis, 1971). In more detail, a focus on the micro-level phenomena of organizing and organizations opened up an opportunity space for this dissertation to sharpen the analytical focus on how the mobilization of resources for certain purposes takes place in a collective. In the case of technology entrepreneurship in Kenya, it was the creation and rapid growth of and profitable exit from innovative entrepreneurial ventures — a painstaking quest for a recipe for entrepreneurial success — that provided a unifying objective for participants in Kenya’s ICT sector and which lent themselves particularly well to my effort to document the unique challenges that occur along the way, unearth the decision making rationales used by the various international and domestic actors and outline the context-specific norms, beliefs and rules that influence collective action. In fact, Kenya’s ICT sector has proved to be a rich and vibrant microcosm for doing exactly that — providing a new context to organization theory for the study of impactful phenomena in order to foster theory development, engage in a meaningful dialogue with practitioners and bring forth an

increasingly — and more genuinely — global research agenda in organization studies (in a similar vein see, for example, award-winning work by Yenkey [2015] on market formation and investment practices in Kenya's stock market).

In this dissertation I thus sought to contribute, on the one hand, to the wider academic conversation in organizational sociology by illuminating new perspectives on the roles and purposes of organizations in society and the unique determinants that govern organizing and organization creation (Donaldson & Walsh, 2015; Pedersen & Dobbin, 1997; Perrow, 1991; Scott & Davis, 2007; Whyte, 2002) as they unfold in a newly emerging and economically vibrant context, such as Kenya's ICT sector. On the other hand, my contributions are tailored to specific debates within management and organization studies and engage directly with four subfields: (1) globalization and diffusion research (Guillén, 2001a), (2) the sociology of work (Barley & Kunda, 2001), (3) entrepreneurship (Thornton, 1999) and (4) population and community ecology (Freeman & Audia, 2006).

Further, I explored interdisciplinary links to help enrich the academic debate by latching on to issues in socioeconomic development (Collier, 2008; Moran & Ghoshal, 1999; Sachs, 2005), drawing on critical reflections of key African philosophers (see, for example, seminal work by Mazrui 2005; Mbembe 2002; Mudimbe 1988; Thiong'o 2009) and using concepts from cultural sociology (Swidler, 1986). Why? Because inductively contextualizing new phenomena outside of well-researched contexts and embedding them in a meaningful theoretical discussion require a more eclectic and hence inevitably interdisciplinary use of theory that is instrumental in order to mirror the empirical observations adequately.

As it turned out, a rigid interpretation of existing theories developed in and for the Global North also significantly limited these theories' applicability and "practicability" (Lewin, 1945; Van de Ven, 1989). Thus, the paucity of management and organizational knowledge conceived in

and for Africa not only put into question the relevance of organization studies for economic development in the continent, despite its apparent potential (Moran & Ghoshal, 1999), but also translated directly into negative externalities for the functionality and efficacy of organizations in Africa — because most theories (and hence most formal knowledge transfer in institutions of higher education) are either nonapplicable or allow only a partial reflection of the complexities that reign in Africa’s economic realities.

Similarly, management books and educational materials about Africa have tended to take a Pan-African perspective, on the assumption that insights from one context can be generalized to Africa as a whole, while country-specific insights have been either extremely rare or simply nonexistent. This circumstance found expression in the passionate words of an informant for this thesis about “the kind of systems that they would have in Washington or in New York. Those systems tend to be useless in our market.... because our market is very...relationship driven. It’s affected by very random things....” It follows that there exists a real and pressing need for actionable knowledge born out of theoretically rigorous — and relevant — research to break out of the old mold and understand what these “random things” are that influence the way business is done in Kenya. Against this backdrop, I applied an organizational lens in the hope that a scholarly focus on organizing and organizations could provide additional momentum to help catalyze organizational efficacy and play a real role in putting into action the agendas of the many hard-working change makers of Africa who imagine and aspire to new futures.

### **1.1.3. Contouring the research endeavor**

Globally, technology entrepreneurship has gained widespread recognition as an engine for innovation, national comparative advantage, industry creation and economic growth (Beckman et al., 2012; OECD, 2015). It has also tended to be most closely associated with successful industry



clusters, such as Silicon Valley, Silicon Wadi and Shenzhen, and with highly successful companies and founders, such as Microsoft and Bill Gates, Apple and Steve Jobs, and Alibaba and Jack Ma. In particular, information flows were catapulted to a global scale by major ICT advances, resulting in an increased awareness of and entanglement between nations and individuals (Drori, 2008), which allowed information to travel faster and farther than ever before — a central element in allowing this wave of enthusiasm for turning innovations into marketable products into a global phenomenon.

Driven by the highly visible success stories of these industry clusters, many localities around the world launched technology clusters of their own (Ciravegna, 2012; Engel, 2015), either through top-down state-led policies to establish, for example, offshore locations for work that could be outsourced, as was the case in India and the Philippines (Manning, 2013), or to attract foreign talent, as was the case in Chile (Gonzalez-Uribe & Leatherbee, 2016), or through bottom-up movements that sought to enact technology entrepreneurship in their own context, of which the almost 100 accelerators and incubators scattered across Africa are visible manifestations (Bright & Hruby, 2015).<sup>2</sup>

Yet most of these localities lacked an underlying organizational environment and institutional support system, meaning a supportive environment that endorsed entrepreneurship as a favorable career option and had in place an entrepreneurial infrastructure that nascent ventures require to reach scale rapidly. In other words, the ingredients that are integral to the recipe for success in technology entrepreneurship — of which venture capital, knowledgeable lawyers, multinational companies (Ferrary & Granovetter, 2009; Florida & Kenney, 1988; Kenney, Han, & Tanaka, 2002), a peculiar collaborative and also competitive culture (Saxenian, 1994) and a

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/technology-centers> for a frequently updated list.

clearly demarcated market niche are a few examples — were not yet in place but had to be actively engineered in order to make technology entrepreneurship a reality and a success (Aldrich & Martinez, 2010). Regardless of this seemingly uphill battle to reach global competitiveness, some of the new locales and contexts have demonstrated vibrant economic activity; Kenya's Silicon Savannah, as outlined above, has been heralded as one of the flagships of the genre and thus was the ideal field site for this thesis.

Against this background, the initial central research question motivating my fieldwork became: How is technology entrepreneurship performed in practice in Kenya? The question is of particular interest and potency, keeping in mind that the entrepreneurial environment for actors in Kenya's Silicon Savannah was remarkably different from that of other already highly successful innovation clusters, while the aspiration levels of industry participants for change, disruption and wealth creation were remarkably high and thus in tune with the promises embedded in the global technology entrepreneurship discourse. Additionally, actors in Kenya had access to and thus remained plugged in to the information flow from the global technology community, which kept them in constant synch with the most recent developments in the global startup movement and the newest innovations and entrepreneurial advice from distant realities — and created the deceptive impression that additional needed resources, such as financial capital, human resources and mentors, were ostensibly within close reach and just “a click away.” Industry participants were thus tasked with engineering a functioning local technology entrepreneurship ecosystem and negotiating a way of doing business that could give rise to successful startup companies capable of mastering not only the local and national market dynamics but also of proving successful on a regional and, if possible, global scale.

This challenge was indeed a unique empirical setting in which actors from diverse backgrounds — which included Kenyans from rural and urban areas, with affluent or low-income

backgrounds, as well as recently returned Kenyans (so-called repats) and individuals and companies from abroad — theorized and rationalized how technology entrepreneurship ought to work and collectively mobilized resources to establish a way to make technology entrepreneurship a success in Kenya. These remarkable collective efforts called for a more thorough analysis.

A qualitative research design and ethnographic techniques were used during a three-month field visit in 2014 that provided the primary data on which the thesis is based. In total, 134 interviews were conducted, and considerable observational data were collected during various site visits to, for example, pitch nights, informal meet-ups, conferences and working offices as well as to public seminars and talks. I also worked from a public co-working space to immerse myself directly in the context. In addition, industry reports and publications from international agencies as well as social media activity supplemented the data. Further, my previous work experience in Kenya, which was in emergency and development aid, turned out to be instrumental in making sense of the data and in identifying the most salient phenomena in them. This approach led to a comprehensive data pool well suited to start the data analysis, theory development and thesis conceptualization.

## **1.2. Behind the Scenes of Technology Entrepreneurship in Kenya: 3 + 1**

Three academic papers and a book publication are the final output of this research endeavor, which sought to bring more clarity to how technology entrepreneurship in Kenya looks in practice. Before laying out the motivation and thought process behind each paper and making the interconnection between them explicit, I will give a very brief overview of the final intellectual product portfolio.

The first paper, “Globalization in Action: Templates, Tensions and Strategies of Action in Kenyan Technology Entrepreneurship,” co-authored with Klaus Weber of Northwestern University in the United States, illuminated in detail the various prescriptions for entrepreneurial success that participants in Kenya’s ICT sector were exposed to and demonstrated how these action options — which were identified by participants as being either local or global — were combined and enacted. From this a model of globalization emerged that highlighted a previously hidden and more dynamic view of globalization. Its main contribution thus related back to the globalization and diffusion literature (Drori, 2008).

The second paper, “Chasing the Next Dollar: How Portfolio Workpreneurs Survive and Thrive in Kenya’s Hustling Economy,” was single-authored and provided a fine-grained view into the work realities of Kenyan individuals by modeling a work portfolio across which Kenyans have to hedge their resources and actions in order to create a robust income flow, promote wealth creation and engender change. The paper incorporated new dimensions into the sociology of work literature that were previously neglected and raised new questions about organization creation in contexts where environmental unpredictability and unstable employment relations are the norm. Its primary contribution was to the sociology of work literature, with significant implications for the future of work, entrepreneurship and organizing.

The third paper, “New Kids on the Block: Applying an Interorganizational Ecology Perspective to the Global Diffusion of Organizational Forms,” was also single-authored and a purely theoretical piece. Inspired by the analysis and observations that crystallized in the first paper, it theorized an alternative perspective in diffusion studies in order to help understand and analyze the global diffusion of organizational blueprints. In particular, in the digital economy new blueprints circulate globally and become enacted in distant regions in the world, such as the venture capitalist and e-commerce retailer that today populate organizational environments

around the world. The effects these new or nonnative organizational forms have on the organizational environments to which they diffuse and on the forms themselves remain entirely unexplored — a gap this paper sought to begin to fill. As an alternative perspective on economic and institutional studies in socioeconomic development, the paper sought to introduce an interorganizational lens — focusing on the interdependencies between organizations — to the academic conversation and used the literature on population and community ecology to do so. Its main contribution was, however, to diffusion studies and organizational sociology in general.

Although not formally part of this thesis, the book *Digital Kenya: An Entrepreneurial Revolution in the Making*, co-edited with Bitange Ndemo of the University of Nairobi and published in 2016, provided a different platform for portraying the vibrancy of the ICT sector in Kenya and the aspirations of its members. In essence, the book aimed to be a comprehensive guide to understanding Kenya's ICT sector and was compiled alongside the thesis. It took a deep dive into one sector of an African economy in order to generate insights, be a guide to understanding the evolution of Kenya's ICT sector and the various approaches “out there” to making technology entrepreneurship work, provoke informed discussion about the future of the sector and become an inspirational source for the next generations of entrepreneurs. The book included 15 chapters from a variety of authors — both knowledgeable scholars and active practitioners — and 14 interviews that were conducted after my fieldwork (thus building on the insights already gained in order to reach additional depth) and was a first steppingstone that will hopefully inspire additional context- and country-specific studies. Its direct contribution was to the entrepreneurship literature. Also, some aspects of the book delivered valuable reading material for coursework in higher education.

### **1.2.1. Globalization in Action: Templates, Tensions and Strategies of Action in Kenyan Technology Entrepreneurship**

As technology entrepreneurship became highly fashionable and innovation clusters were mushrooming globally, the impetus to write this first paper came from the need not only to understand these developments as outcomes of an increasing awareness and entanglement of actors from distant locales — that is, globalization (Guillén, 2001a) — but also to tease out the location-specific dynamics that influenced how technology entrepreneurship becomes enacted, performed and anchored in a new locale. Essentially, some of the underlying and more fundamental questions that provided mental reference points for theorization were whether inferences could be made if the practice of technology entrepreneurship — meaning the way things are done in a given technology entrepreneurship scene — would actually be the same or similar in Silicon Savannah, Chilecon Valley, Shenzhen or Silicon Valley? And if not, what were the reasons why it differed? The impetus to formulate these questions emanated from the constant comparisons (local versus global) with distant others that were pervasive in our informants' narratives. We also wanted to know: What were the consequences of anchoring a “new way of doing things”? Would there be challenges, such as conflict or tension, or are adoption and implementation rather to be seen as smooth transition processes?

To answer these questions, Klaus Weber and I moved away from existing approaches in economics that study cluster creation, ecosystem configuration and industry emergence. We thus selected a cultural lens to investigate technology entrepreneurship and interpret the data, conceptualizing the diffusion of technology entrepreneurship to locales around the world as a cultural dimension of globalization. This approach led us to think more intensively about the novelty and change that technology entrepreneurship was introducing in Kenya. It also helped us

to think more specifically about how business is done in other sectors in Kenya, how conventions, norms, implicit rules and regulations differed in Kenya's ICT sector and hence how they would require a substantial shift and change from industry participants if technology entrepreneurship was indeed going to succeed.

We understood that technology entrepreneurship allowed industry participants in Kenya's ICT sector not only to tackle old problems in new ways, but also to identify and conceptualize entirely new problems that could now be solved — or, as some informants paraphrased it, problems that their customers did not pay attention to and did not know they had. Think of instant international money transfer, fast inner-city distribution of physical goods, the creation of a comprehensive, virtual addressing system for everyone or the efficient organization of workflows tailored to the Kenyan experience — all these had either not yet been solved or had been addressed with legacy technology (i.e., paper based) that rendered unsatisfactory results.

Technology entrepreneurship created a new way to use and combine existing resources and draw on new resources and the digital infrastructure to create manifestly superior solutions. These new solution approaches were put forth by companies such as BitPesa (instant international money transfer using Bitcoin), Sendy (transport of goods in urban areas), okhi (a virtual addressing system) and Wezatele (workflow optimization). In order to make this happen, new roles and tasks had to be distributed and coordinated, determining “who does what” and allowing an ecosystem of diverse actors with various functions to emerge. Actors, here, should be understood to mean organizations, such as venture capitalists, accelerators, incubators, multinational companies and startups with unique functional roles and specific purposes. Similarly, intraorganizational roles and tasks had to be distributed among individuals — another group of actors — classified by labels, such as CEO, entrepreneur, coder, mentor or trainer. Interestingly, these roles and new task environments came with prescriptions about how they

ought to be performed. The prescriptions had the character of a rulebook that strongly resembled an implicit yet pervasive recipe for success containing proven actions and strategies for becoming a successful technology entrepreneur. In other words, the belief was that if these rules were strictly followed, entrepreneurial success should be the outcome. In fact, once we paid attention to these rule-like prescriptions and systematically organized them into what we called “templates,” it became clear that they substantially affected economic and social activity.

Consider, for example, the concept of failure. In the context of technology entrepreneurship, failure is seen as a necessary condition for innovation and entrepreneurial success. Put differently, failure, it is believed, is inevitable in the process of innovation and should therefore be actively embraced and made part of the entrepreneurial process rather than avoided or stigmatized. Who creates and promotes these prescriptions? The prescriptions are nourished by successful entrepreneurs, investors and consultants who share their way of success via social and traditional media as well as conferences and informal conversations. As a consequence, the information is broadcast around the world and takes on the character of common wisdom. Traces of fostering a culture that embraces failure can also be found in policy briefs, for example, such as in the case for the European Union, which has sought to instigate entrepreneurial activity by changing the connotations of failure in order to help promote more entrepreneurial risk taking (European Commission, 2015a, 2015b).

Once we paid attention to these prescriptions, we realized that they were in conflict with deeply held beliefs about how business was done in Kenya and how Kenyans believed their economy or markets work. The consequence? Industry participants in Kenya’s ICT sector were torn between two different worlds, the local Kenyan way of conducting successful economic activity and the global technology entrepreneurship way of becoming a successful entrepreneur. This tension allowed us to flesh out the different rationales undergirding each way of doing



business in great detail and thus to expose the different conditions and assumptions each recipe for success was founded on and the various dimensions of economic life they penetrated. It proved to be a generative exercise and brought to light the hidden dynamics of doing business in Kenya today. In a next step we analyzed how participants reconciled these two different worlds in order to be able to enact their roles and solve their tasks and thus be able to perform technology entrepreneurship. Thus new combinations of roles, tasks and organizations emerged — something we came to understand as the generativity of globalization — in a quest to find a technology entrepreneurship model that works in the Kenyan context. We captured these observations and interpretations with a dynamic process model of globalization.

Turning back to the aforementioned questions: The staggering insights that the data analysis and subsequent theorization brought forth allowed us to argue that there is both an implicit agreement between and substantial deviation away from the ways in which technology entrepreneurship is performed in the various locales across the globe. That is, the roles and tasks that come along with technology entrepreneurship follow a common script and thus provide a surface-level agreement that establishes a functional structures and sets the scene — the know-what of technology entrepreneurship. For example, there is a common understanding about the roles and purposes of an incubator, law firm or venture capitalist, just as there is agreement on the roles and tasks of a coder, mentor and entrepreneur. Yet confusion comes in, in how these roles and tasks should be performed in order to achieve success — the know-how of technology entrepreneurship. As a corollary, the actual day-to-day practices of becoming and being involved in the ICT sector in Kenya versus engaging in, say, Chilecon Valley differ. Why? Because as technology entrepreneurship becomes appropriated and imported into a new context, it is set on a dynamic path toward successful implementation in which prescriptions from the technology entrepreneurship template interact with prevailing prescriptions about the local, context-specific

economic and social realities. Here the context creates location-specific tensions that need to be addressed and resolved by industry participants and that determine in turn how technology entrepreneurship will be performed in a particular locale. In other words, whatever is perceived as being at odds and as a source of tension in Kenya may turn out to be perfectly reconcilable in Chile. The gravity of the tensions, meaning the extent to which templates prescribe contradictory or opposing rules for success, influences the integration of technology entrepreneurship in a new locality and sets it on a distinct path.

Not only would comparative research provide further clarity into these matters, but while we examined the data we started focusing on the generativity of globalization — an idea that sharpens the analytical focus on unprecedented resource combinations and institutional innovations but also on the backlash to globalization and that requires further investigation and theorization. The unanticipated and unintended consequences of globalization are a particularly fertile ground for future research. Examining the generative power of globalization thus promises to display the changes effected by globalization in a new light — a task that I seek to take up in the future.

### **1.2.2. Chasing the Next Dollar: How Portfolio Workpreneurs Survive and Thrive in Kenya's Hustling Economy**

The second of the three papers that make up this dissertation deals in particular with one challenge to integrate technology entrepreneurship in Kenya that is the tendency of Kenyans to become enmeshed in multiple businesses or work engagements simultaneously rather than in sequence. The work rationales for doing multiple things at the same time rather than one after the other seemed to be confined not just to entrepreneurs in Kenya or to participants in Kenya's ICT sector, but to be pervasive in the country and to apply just as much to the poor (see Thieme,

2013) as it did to the middle- or upper-income segments (Franceschi, 2015; Ndemo, 2016) and to have profound effects on the inner workings of society. This phenomenon not only became a prominent theme during my fieldwork, but also related back to my prior work experience in emergency and development aid, where I experienced instances of it among colleagues and so-called beneficiaries of emergency aid programs. Relying on only one income source seemed irrational to Kenyans and fueled a drive to diversify or, as it is known, to “hedge your bets” and put your “eggs” in multiple rather than just one basket.

Initially, an entrepreneurial lens seemed to be the best way forward to analyze this phenomenon and to feed into the niche literature on portfolio entrepreneurs (Ucbasaran, Westhead, & Wright, 2009). This literature, however, focused mostly on high-income and highly successful entrepreneurs who managed multiple businesses concurrently, finding its most visible exemplars in entrepreneurs such as Elon Musk and Richard Branson. Although the literature partially reflected the phenomenon, it remained tied largely to the domain of entrepreneurship in the Global North. My data, however, revealed an entirely different economic and social dynamic. In Kenya, entrepreneurs or workers were not necessarily engaged in organization creation and concerned with organizational growth; it rather seemed that entrepreneurship can also be an instrumental means for economic survival and income generation. Similarly, individuals who would otherwise fit the entrepreneur label were also engaged in project work and many other activities. As a result, potential boundaries between work and private life, for example, were either vague or nonexistent.

I thus decided to steer away from the entrepreneurship literature as the main lens with which to analyze this diversification behavior. As I continued to make sense of the multidimensional character that expressed itself in what many in Kenya call “hustling,” it became apparent that the sociology of work literature fit the empirical observations best and would allow

me to weave in additional literature streams for a more holistic examination of the phenomenon. That is to say, engaging in multiple work arrangements simultaneously as described in the literature on project work, contingent work and portfolio work (Barley & Kunda, 2004, 2001; Handy, 1994) needs to be interconnected and expanded into other spheres of economic and social life. More specifically, to understand Kenya's work realities adequately, activities that relate to social networks and personal finances should be included for a broader understanding of the contemporary work life. These additional dimensions are inextricably linked to traditional conceptions of work and entrepreneurship and are needed to help ensure economic survival.

The motivation behind this paper thus became to mirror the empirical observations with a primarily phenomenologically-driven contribution. As a result, I wrote a paper that resisted the conventional push to use a theoretical framework in order to set the scene for the study but rather allowed the context and its phenomena to lead. The idea was then to use the discussion section to involve theory and to try to discern the implications of the empirical results. I therefore opted to seek publication in a particular journal that appreciated such an approach.

To give the intellectual contribution further leverage, I linked my observations in Kenya to the drastic structural labor market changes in the Global North, where contract work and flexible work arrangements have recently experienced a stark rise and stable lifetime employment has become increasingly unattainable for the large majority of the population, coming to resemble a myth more than a reality. Thus, an investigation into an economy that is characterized by high degrees of informal labor may well surface new concepts that can not only be of use in studying workers in the Global South, but also have substantial applicability and implications for the Global North. Trying to push through the conventional boundaries between Global North and South is a separate and admittedly politicized conversation that this paper enters by proposing that a fresh look at labor dynamics in Kenya could offer insightful findings for the study of work

relations in the United States or Europe. To go a step further, the paper does not confine its outreach to the domain of work but also distills implications for organizing dynamics and organizations. Economic volatility and unstable labor markets increase the unpredictability of future incomes, with profound repercussions for the individual but also for organization creation and growth. Weaving income stability into a volatile economy shifts attention away from creating organizations that can help solve more complex societal problems to trying to build a robust portfolio of engagements that help ensure survival. Although the past decades have seen an unprecedented rise in the numbers of organizations in the Global North (Carroll & Hannan, 2000; Perrow, 1991; Whyte, 2002), the increasing precariousness of employment also puts the future of these organizations at risk. The implications are critical, as the paper argues, and call for further attention.

The paper brings two important topics into the foreground for a future research agenda — first, the future of organizing and organizations in, for and beyond Africa and, second, the future of work for “portfolio workpreneurs,” a term I coined for this thesis that blends elements of portfolio work with the agentic notion of the entrepreneur epitomized by the verb “entrepreneurizing” (Rindova et al., 2009) to mean the active creation of multidimensional work portfolios by individuals for economic survival, wealth creation and the possibility to exert agency for change creation. If organization creation as a socially desirable form of work is a given, the question then becomes what changes to the institutional environment are needed to undertake organizational work despite the drastic changes in today’s labor markets and the ascent of precarious work. In other words, challenges arise, not only as to who will commit to becoming an entrepreneur and who is capable of tolerating the risks, but also as to how can organizational work be presented and understood as being desirable and be designed in such a way that organizational objectives are still achieved despite the multidimensional work life of the

individuals doing such work. The societal risk here is that working for organizations becomes an increasingly elitist phenomenon for the few (who can afford to put all their eggs in one basket), with detrimental effects for the many (who cannot afford to do so). This requires further academic scrutiny.

### **1.2.3. New Kids on the Block: Applying an Interorganizational Ecology Perspective to the Global Diffusion of Organizational Forms**

The third and final academic paper for this thesis was inspired by a finding that crystallized in the first paper and that is also connected to the second paper. It deals again with the tendency of entrepreneurs to have multiple businesses under management in multiple, unrelated industry sectors and investigates this phenomena by taking a closer look at the structure of the organizational environment. This approach not only introduces a new view in understanding contemporary organizing dynamics in Kenya, but also parts way significantly with the two prior papers in that the third paper is a purely theoretical piece.

The initial observation and problem that guided theorization was inspired by a question that many entrepreneurs were tinkering with: how to successfully copy companies, such as Amazon or Alibaba, in an entirely new market? Arguably the markets in which Amazon or Alibaba are successfully operational and the ones in which their organizational forms become newly adopted and implemented are host to a long list of variables that constitute their differences. Any one of them may potentially complicate a form's successful integration, yet I focused here on the organizational environment as a whole — the reason being that it seemed to match the empirical observations best and that it opened up a significant and generative theory gap. The focus on the organizational environment also forged a link between institutional economics, organization studies and socioeconomic development, revealing the importance of

organizations in translating the policy changes that are frequently brought forth by economists into action. Thus factoring in the roles of organizations and the organizational environment in catalyzing economic development provides a perspective that is complementary to that of the prevailing work from other academic disciplines.

The focus on the organizational environment and more specifically on the literature of organizational ecology provided two important insights that helped illuminate the dynamic in Kenya. First, organizations are modeled after blueprints, and once surface-level features are stripped off a core organizational structure or design, also known as organizational form, emerges that allows organizations to be categorized and differentiated (Carroll & Hannan, 2000). From this point of view, organizations such as e-commerce retailers (e.g., Amazon and Alibaba) differ substantially from, say, logistic companies (e.g., UPS and DHL) in how they organize their operations, with whom they compete and whom they target as clients. These organizational forms have emerged to solve fundamentally different functional problems in society. However, what this example reveals is that organizational forms can also be dependent on each other. Put differently, the e-commerce retailer focuses on solving one core functional problem — creating a virtual exchange platform for goods and service that trumps alternative options — while logistical companies focus on developing efficient solutions for transporting goods and thus completing exchange relationships. Both entities are interdependent and require each other's functional competencies and services in order to operate — an insight that is attributed to the literature of interorganizational ecology (also known as community ecology) (Freeman & Audia, 2006; Rao, 2005). As a result, organizations that are dependent on the existence of organizations of other forms face severe complications once adopted in new organizational environments whose interorganizational ecology has a different composition or structure.

Imagine, for example, a market in which one of these organizational forms does not exist. What if logistical companies do not exist or provide unsatisfactory solutions and thus do not meet the standards that e-commerce retailers or other organizations require in order to function. The initial question then turns into this: How do you successfully clone companies, such as Amazon or Alibaba, in organizational contexts where ancillary firms like transportation and logistics providers are either scarce or nonexistent? This question becomes both theoretically and phenomenologically appealing, given that organizational forms are frequently imported into new contexts and are thus, like other elements, part of the globalization process. Yet the integration of nonnative blueprints creates substantial friction. This dynamic and its repercussions have remained outside of the purview of management and organization studies despite by-now rather numerous normalized occurrences. This observation provided the theoretical framework and motivation to start theorizing the integration of nonnative organizational forms into novel organizational environments. Hence, the last academic paper of this thesis models the diffusion process of organizational forms into new organizational environments, thereby linking the interorganizational ecology literature to diffusion studies. The paper further alludes to the idea that changing the policy environment alone and making institutional environments more conducive and favorable to business, such as the World Bank's Doing Business Index would suggest (IFC & The World Bank, 2012), is only one component in creating a vibrant organizational environment. The diversity of organizational forms and thus the functional problems to be successfully solved are additional components needed to launch new organizational populations or industry sectors.

An additional insight from population ecology spurred further thoughts for future research. Namely, that organizational forms are solution approaches at the disposal of societies and thus that the diversity of organizational forms constitute a solution repository with which



societies can tackle their challenges which, in consequence, thrusts a new question onto center stage (Carroll & Hannan, 2000; Ruef, 2000): How can we, as a society, solve the grand global challenges that arise from, for example, climate change that require global organizing and organizations when most, if not all, organizational forms evolved to solve predominantly local problems and hence require alteration before they can internationalize? The challenge thus becomes to envision and design novel organizational forms proactively — with the accent here not on making organizations fit new challenges but on inventing new organizational blueprints — that use global problems as their reference point and thus by develop global functional competencies from the outset that are not tied to a particular locale. Digital technologies can enable these sorts of organizational configurations, but at present institutionalized organizational models — or to put it more bluntly, organizational legacies, — still carry the imprints of their past (Marquis, 2003) and are not equipped to deal with the complexities inherent in developing solution approaches for grand global challenges.

#### **1.2.4. The “+1” — Digital Kenya: An Entrepreneurial Revolution in the Making**

The idea of curating an edited volume about Kenya’s ICT sector arose during my fieldwork and was largely caused by two observations. First, as noted above, Nairobi is a central hub in Sub-Saharan Africa in general, and Kenya’s ICT sector in particular has garnered considerable attention, with the result that the Silicon Savannah became subject to a constant inflow of international human capital. Because there was no central repository that documented the history of ICT in Kenya, individuals from abroad came to “learn,” and industry participants had to tell their story as it all happened over and over again. A central repository, then, that documented the various viewpoints about Kenya seemed useful. The second observation was that a considerable number of researchers were investigating the ICT scene and using various lenses to understand its

dynamics. Bringing these academics together with practitioners who had their own vision of why Kenya's ICT sector had come to be and what its unique challenges are for the future created a compelling setting for launching a book project that could bind together these diverse views and opinions. An additional motivating factor that became more prominent as co-editor Bitange Ndemo (a former permanent secretary of Kenya's ICT Authority and one of the key figures in the nation's ICT sector) and I were looking for a publisher was the realization that a book about entrepreneurship and management in a single sector in a single country in Africa was a novelty. In fact, most publishers pushed for a Pan-African publication on technology entrepreneurship and were unable to see the potential for a one-country study. The paucity of management and entrepreneurship books and educational materials on the subject provided yet another motivating factor and allowed the book to break entirely new ground.

In order to make the book widely available, we made two decisions. First, the book had to be published in open-access form to allow the new knowledge it offered to diffuse widely. Second, in order to accommodate a wide range of viewpoints and make the book enticing for both academics and practitioners, we chose to include two different formats — written chapters and transcribed interviews. In the end, 15 peer-reviewed chapters and 14 interviews made it to publication.

Each chapter brought forward a unique argument (rather than just describing and documenting the evolution of Kenya's ICT sector) in order to catalyze conversations about the past, present and future of the sector. Contributions ranged from depicting the strategies that ventures in Kenya use in uncovering unique market opportunities to examinations of the inner life of technology entrepreneurship and of managing the fine details of doing business in Kenya. The topics also included elaborations of the social media landscape, reflections on the political backstories that were involved in connecting Kenya to the global fiber cable grid, examinations

of the equity investment scene and concrete recommendations about what will be needed to move Kenya's ICT sector to the next level — that is, producing highly successful ventures and entrepreneurial exits.

The 14 interviews with key entrepreneurs and experts on Kenya's ICT scene provided unique opportunities to build on the insights gained from the fieldwork and analysis conducted during the development of the thesis, which allowed us to deepen the conversations in turn. The interviews were conceptualized to provide a candid look into the inner life of technology entrepreneurship in Kenya, to document the ideas, motivation and aspirations that fueled the action of these key individuals and to provide a source of inspirations for the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Taken together, *Digital Kenya* is a repository of multiple perspectives and diverse arguments that all seek to capture this unique moment in Kenya's ICT sector from various viewpoints. It is an inspirational volume and guideline to Kenya's ICT sector that has enhanced the robustness of the findings that the thesis produced by significantly deepening my knowledge of the sector.

What stands out from the publication of *Digital Kenya* is the need to document and monitor the evolution of Kenya's ICT sector in the future through a longitudinal study using, among others, the informants used for the thesis and to replicate this book model for other sectors and nations in Africa in order to illuminate the complexity and diversity that reign in the reality of the continent's economies.

In the following each of the three academic paper is offered in the form in which they were submitted.

## **2. Globalization in Action: Templates, Tensions and Strategies of Action in Kenyan Technology Entrepreneurship**

### **2.1. Abstract**

The proliferation of seemingly universal templates for economic action is a cultural dimension of economic globalization. One example of such a template is technology entrepreneurship, which is increasingly presented as a recipe for economic development and national competitiveness. But what does it mean to perform technology entrepreneurship? The paper develops a micro-phenomenological answer to this question. The case of the nascent information and communications technology (ICT) sector in Nairobi, Kenya, shows how participants in the sector have constructed contrasting templates of entrepreneurship that are coded as alternatively “local” and “global.” We use ethnographic and semiotic methods to understand the content of these

templates and the strategies of action that participants use to manage tensions between the template prescriptions. Each strategy gives rise to unintended consequences that prevent the full resolution of the tensions and thus prompt subsequent action. As a result we develop a dynamic process model of local changes in response to globalization that captures the ongoing and generative dimension of diffusion and translation processes.

## **2.2. Introduction**

In contemporary discourse, entrepreneurship is generally cast as a positive force that advances socio-economic development. Entrepreneurship has become a stylized, universal and powerful cultural narrative (Audretsch, 2007; Brandl & Bullinger, 2009). At the center of this narrative are technology entrepreneurs (Beckman et al., 2012), who are celebrated for commercializing transformative technologies that disrupt established business practices, re-shape human interaction and create immense wealth (EIU, 2012; The Economist, 2014). Elon Musk, Jack Ma and Larry Page are examples of visible figures that nurture what can be seen as institutionalized myths of entrepreneurship (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Miscione, 2015; Ogbor & Avenue, 2000; Patai, 1972). These stories have captured the imagination of individuals around the globe who aspire to opportunities for wealth, progress and change. Thus, while the environment assumed in these stories is rarely in fact found outside of Silicon Valley, Chilecon Valley (Chile), Silicon Gulf (Philippines) and Silicon Savannah (Kenya) are just a few among the almost 100 locales<sup>3</sup> seeking to enact what is best seen as a global template of technology entrepreneurship embedded in these narratives.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/technology-centers> for a frequently updated list

<sup>4</sup> Examples of recent publications in the popular press and policy arena: Middle East (Schroeder, 2013), Israel (Senor & Singer, 2011), Asia (Fannin, 2012), Latin America (Ciravegna, 2012), Africa (Bright & Hruby, 2015; Olopade, 2014; Thakkar, 2015) and Europe (European Commission, 2015a, 2015b)

But how do local actors reconcile this conception of technology entrepreneurship with local environments that may be at odds with those depicted in the stylized narratives? Existing research on globalization in management and economic sociology offers only limited insight into the interaction of global and local ideas in those contexts. This research has generated a nuanced understanding of diffusion and translation processes (Guillén, 2001b; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997), and of the mechanisms that influence adoption, implementation and performance (e.g. Fiss & Zajac 2004; Weber et al. 2009). The implied sender–receiver image of diffusion research evokes as a conceptual endpoint the adoption and implementation of specific changes. Applied to the present context, this approach would imply a concern with degree of implementation, fidelity of adoption and vibrancy of technology entrepreneurship in the locale. This comes at the expense of understanding open-ended and indirect dimensions of globalization, where the immediate result of adding new elements to a local setting are increased heterogeneity, tensions, unintended consequences and new opportunities, which provoke subsequent responses that go beyond the simple adoption or adaptation of the imported elements.

Studies of institutional translation (Drori, 2008; Fairclough & Thomas, 2004; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008) and work on glocalization (Drori, Höllerer, & Walgenbach, 2015) have begun to address the editing, interpretation and integration of global elements in local settings. This research can be developed further by examining not only how new ideas become assimilated to a new context — a process that again suggests an end point of stasis — but by studying the generative dynamics of globalization, where increased heterogeneity through the local co-existence of practices demands further action. The arrival of new ideas may result in local adoption or translation but also in backlash, creative recombination or altogether new designs.

Our analysis of the generative dynamics of globalization “in action” is grounded in a micro-phenomenological approach that investigates how global ideas are locally represented and

negotiated. An in-depth interpretive study of Kenya's ICT sector conducted during two research field visits in 2012 and 2014 provides the main empirical material for this analysis. Using grounded theory development and semiotic analysis, we discovered a comprehensive understanding of the varying meanings attached to entrepreneurship, actors' pragmatic action responses and their consequences. From these observations, we developed a dynamic model of globalization processes in a local setting.

We observed that entrepreneurship was represented in two stylized templates — ideal-typical representations of activity that serve as interpretive lenses and guides for action (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008) — that were coded alternatively as “local” and “global.” The incompatibility of these local and global templates created tensions that complicated action choices. Thus, the central inquiry of this paper is: *How do actors in the locale engage with the local and global templates?* We observed diverse approaches for pursuing entrepreneurial goals and solving practical problems, such as how to develop a viable business model, attract financing or recruit employees. These approaches, akin to strategies of action in Swidler's (1986) terms, ranged from passive compliance with one template to the deliberate blending of templates. Yet such efforts often created unintended consequences that demanded renewed action. The process model that emerged from our analysis suggests that increased local heterogeneity sets in motion dynamics that do not quickly settle into a new equilibrium but remain ongoing and open-ended. Complementary to research on globalization at a macro scale, our micro-phenomenological study implies that globalization is a heterogeneous local phenomenon shaped by local actors' pragmatic concerns and their representations of global ideas.

## **2.3. Theoretical Background: Micro-Phenomenological Studies of Globalization**

Conceptual representations of globalization frame not only academic inquiry but also shape the approaches of policymakers and practitioners (Campbell, 2004; Fiss & Hirsch, 2005). Meyer and colleagues (1997) put forth a typology of conceptions of globalization: Analyses grounded in realism and phenomenology form one axis, and micro and macro research the other. Conceptions imply explanations, interventions and blind spots (Guillén, 2001b). For example, macro-realist accounts bring to the fore structural linkages, power relations, political interests and market forces for explaining the diffusion and implementation of formal structures and policies (Brune, Garrett, & Kogut, 2004; Dobbin, Simmons, & Garrett, 2007; Henisz, Zelner, & Guillén, 2005; Polillo & Guillén, 2005; Simmons & Elkins, 2004; Klaus Weber et al., 2009). Micro-realist accounts discern local interests, preferences and power dynamics that shape adoption and implementation behaviors (Fiss & Zajac, 2004; Guler, Guillén, Macpherson, & Guillen, 2002; Rao & Hirsch, 2003). Macro-phenomenologists focus on universal narratives, themes and rules that are part of a world culture in which isomorphic pressures mold nation states and NGOs, and transnational expert communities hold cultural power (Boli & Thomas, 1997; Drori, Jang, & Meyer, 2006; Meyer et al., 1997; Schofer & Meyer, 2005). From this vantage point, even particularistic responses at the local level are only rendered meaningful with reference to their position in global dynamics, giving rise to the view that “the local is a global phenomenon” (Robertson & Khondker, 1998).

Micro-phenomenological frameworks emphasize the role of community context (Marquis & Battilana, 2009) and offer a deeper exploration of local heterogeneity and processes. One prominent line of work examines translation through interpreting, editing and adapting an element to a new context (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008) and explores the



simultaneous manifestation of sameness and variety — “glocalization” (Drori et al., 2015; Robertson, 1995, 2015). Zilber (2006), for example, analyzed the translation of universal themes such as individualism and nationalism from the wider institutional environment into one domain — the ICT sector in Israel — and Boxenbaum (2006) inquired how practices of diversity management were interpreted and adjusted by Danish firms. A micro-phenomenological approach inverts some assumptions that are common in globalization research.

### **2.3.1. Exportation versus appropriation of “the global”**

Globalization is often cast as Americanization (Djelic, 1998) and McDonalidization (Ritzer, 1996), models in which a dominant power replaces local diversity with a hegemonic or coercive one-size-fits-all approach. The conceptualization of globalization as a unidirectional “push process” from the global core remains widespread and in many instances reflects reality. But global ideas can also serve as inspirational sources that are appropriated or desired by local actors (Büyükokutan, 2011). A micro-phenomenological conceptualization of globalization must begin with how global ideas are represented locally, be it as coercion or inspiration, and must, investigate the relation between global and local ideas that result from this representation. The corollary then is to see *the global as a local phenomenon*.

### **2.3.2. Principled versus pragmatic action formation**

Many studies see globalization as driven by actors who purposefully promote principles as part of broader ideological projects. Their actions arise from an agenda of advancing interests, identities or ideologies by actively importing, transposing, abstracting or editing elements to fit with the local setting (Ansari, Fiss, & Zajac, 2010; Boxenbaum & Battilana, 2005; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Micro-phenomenology more readily acknowledges situational dynamics — pragmatic

efforts to solve the problems at hand — that are only loosely connected to enduring principles of a greater globalization project. Action taken is driven by every day and mundane situations that actors find themselves in, as a result of task and social environments (Goffman, 1974). Thus, *action is prompted by situational demands* (Ross & Nisbet, 2011) and is driven by culturally conditioned routine practices (Lamont, Beljean, & Clair, 2014) that in turn create new situations for action (Merton, 1936).

### **2.3.3. Endpoints versus ongoing process**

Most current investigations of globalization construe the diffusion of ideas as a process with an endpoint of renewed stasis (adoption). Recent efforts have connected adoption to “quality” of implementation (Klaus Weber et al., 2009) or have seen the intensity of global pressures as being subject to renegotiation and reversal (Zelner, Henisz, & Guy, 2009). Translation studies, albeit focused on the performative process of imitation (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008), have similarly placed adaptation at the end of their analysis. These analytic approaches barely address less immediate effects, when ideas become part of a new repertoire that local actors can access in new situations. Watkins and Swidler (2013), for example, pointed to the generative power of globalization. In their study, donor-driven HIV/AIDS interventions did not reach their intended goal but still triggered impressive changes and contributed to Malawians passionate belief that education is the route to a “bright future” (Watkins & Swidler, 2013). Similarly, Hoang (2015) uncovered a subtle backlash against Western influence as Vietnamese finance professionals formed a new national ideal that is constructed in opposition to Western influence and that claimed superiority. Such studies suggest more indirect generative effects of globalization where *globalization is an emergent and on-going process without an immediate processual end-point*.

In studying the nascent Kenyan ICT sector, we sought to analyze our observations in a way that emphasizes local representations, is grounded in pragmatic prompts for action and pays attention to generative dynamics that look beyond initial responses toward indirect effects. We examine three research questions that allow us to theorize generative micro-processes: How is technology entrepreneurship (variably) understood by participants in the Kenyan ICT sector? How do participants respond to the co-existence of these understandings? And, what are the effects of their responses? Before presenting our research design, findings and interpretations, we offer some background of the study setting.

## **2.4. Information and Communications Technology Entrepreneurship in Kenya**

Technology entrepreneurship lies at the intersection of two popular narratives that capture the imagination of followers across the globe. ICT presumably help transcend spatial, material and temporal barriers and embody the promise of a new world with decentralized knowledge production and open access to knowledge and opportunities (Miscione, 2015; Mosco, 1998). ICT products, so the narrative goes, are steps towards progress and change by empowering the masses and creating solutions for societal problems (Miscione, 2015). Technological solutions are said to have diffused globally to urban and rural areas alike (see, e.g., (Bekkers & Homburg, 2007; Noir & Walsham, 2007; Walsham, 2001).

A key component of this optimistic narrative of technology is the entrepreneur. Portrayed often as a heroic figure, the entrepreneur is construed as an autonomous actor who creates new solutions with the aspiration of disrupting industries and transforming societies. In the wake of modernity, the individual becomes the source of problems and solutions (Frank, Meyer, & Miyahara, 1995). The entrepreneurial society is, therefore, based on the idea that innovative

entrepreneurial achievements and success trigger changes that in turn will lead to wealth and economic growth (Audretsch, 2007; Schumpeter, 1934). Technological and social advancement depends on risky investments in new technologies and is only possible if investors buy into the technology entrepreneur's vision and if the interest of both parties align (De Clercq, Fried, Lehtonen, & Sapienza, 2006; Ferrary & Granovetter, 2009; Gompers & Lerner, 2001; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001).

Taken together, technology and entrepreneurship create a powerful narrative — an institutionalized myth (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) — with global appeal. This myth motivates action and replaces other formerly prominent actors, such as governments, large corporations and nongovernment organizations, with the imagery of the successful technology entrepreneur. In practice, the technology entrepreneur uses engineering advances to build new ventures, create markets, and lay the foundation for new industry clusters (Beckman et al., 2012). ICT entrepreneurs transform “countless aspects of the world economy, impacting sectors as varied as banking, retail, energy, transportation, education, publishing, media or health (OECD, 2015: 1).” Silicon Valley is arguably the global prototype of this form of technology entrepreneurship (Kenney & Patton, 2006). Because of Silicon Valley's visibility and cultural and economic power, stories of its entrepreneurs have become internationally known as they spread through mass media, conferences and consultants. Vivid stories raise aspirations to mimic the success, as evidenced by the many creative appropriations of the label “Silicon Valley” (Bresnahan, Gambardella, & Saxenian, 2001), and portrayals in the media arguably nurture a global “start-up cult” (The Economist, 2014) in Asia (Fannin, 2012), the Middle East (Schroeder, 2013), Israel (Senor & Singer, 2011) and Latin America (Ciravegna, 2012). The narrative of technology entrepreneurship has observable manifestations in many places around the world, its historical origin notwithstanding.

Nairobi, often designated as the economic hub of East Africa (World Bank, 2012), is one of Africa's central nodes in global flows of goods, money and culture. The local technology entrepreneurship narrative received a jolt when the first international fiber optic cable reached the coastal city of Mombasa in 2009 and connected Kenya to the global-high speed grid (see Ndemo and Weiss [2016] for an overview of Kenya's ICT sector). A common reference point for Kenya's technological success is the flagship venture M-Pesa, a mobile banking solution that digitizes most financial transactions in Kenya (see Omwansa & Sullivan 2012). The World Bank (2010) attributes the creation of at least 70,000 new employment opportunities to Kenya's "ICT revolution" and expects Kenya's ICT sector to grow by 20% annually. Mobile technology innovations and product-based start-up enterprises dominate in Kenya. Kenya hosts both technology ventures that are modeled after successful multi-national enterprises such as Yelp, Amazon, Groupon or Uber and domestic innovators that aim to create products and applications with global reach, such as BitPesa, an enterprise that combines bitcoin with mobile banking solutions<sup>5</sup>. More recently, ICT entrepreneurs in the region have started to make headlines in the popular press (Dolan, 2015) and have shifted attention away from the traditional economic focus on government, resource extraction and foreign aid. The government intends to establish an ICT innovation cluster on the outskirts of Nairobi, reflecting the sector's growing importance to Kenyan policymakers (Khamala, 2011).

The sector's growth, economic reforms, a positive economic outlook and recent "Afro-optimism" (Bright & Hruby, 2015; McKinsey, 2010; McKinsey Global Institute, 2013; The Economist, 2013a) have contributed to the emergence of an organizational field for technology entrepreneurship in Nairobi that reproduces roles, rituals and frames of reference that encompass

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<sup>5</sup> [www.bitpesa.co](http://www.bitpesa.co)

the generic “*know-what*” of technology entrepreneurship (Aldrich & Yang, 2012). The roles of technology entrepreneur, venture capitalist (VC), angel investor and consulting firms are widely recognized, and forms such as co-working spaces, hubs, incubators and accelerators as well as local offices of international IT companies have proliferated. Rituals such as pitch nights, hackathons, meet-ups, competitions, and conferences can be readily found. Participants in the sector solve everyday demands such as compiling a pitch deck, hiring employees or coaching an entrepreneur and thus do not lack the “*know-what*” of performing technology entrepreneurship. At this surface level of activity, globalization has ostensibly occurred. The question rather is one of “*know-how*,” meaning how this surface infrastructure of roles, organizations and rituals is performed in practice. It is here, in choices about how to be an entrepreneur, investor or IT worker, that ambiguities arise and approaches differ in how to navigate the guide to action of a global technology entrepreneurship ideal and the demands of a distinctive local environment. It is at this point that our empirical analysis commences.

## **2.5. Method**

### **2.5.1. Case selection**

We became interested in Kenya’s vibrant technology entrepreneurship scene in 2012, in the context of conducting 22 interviews and background research in a pilot study of Kenya’s risk capital industry. Technology entrepreneurship garnering considerable attention locally and internationally — perhaps enough to qualify as hype — and we decided to explore technology entrepreneurship in Kenya in greater depth. It then became clear that Kenya’s emerging ICT industry represented an excellent setting to investigate the more general case of how a diverse set of actors constructs a new sector at the early stages of “importing” global resources. The early stage of the industry and our access to participants allowed us to study dynamics at the critical

junction of emergence, before practices and international linkages were locked in and institutionalized.

### **2.5.2. Data collection**

Secondary data sources, including industry- and country-specific academic, consultant, IMF and the World Bank publications, provided contextual knowledge that was supplemented by a close reading of online sources and social media posts related to the sector half a year prior, during and after the actual field study (for an introduction into ethnographic work on online communication, see Beneito-Montagut 2011; for a contextual perspective on the centrality of social media in Kenya, see Kaigwa 2016). The central empirical work for the findings reported in this paper occurred during an intensive three-month data collection visit to Nairobi in 2014<sup>6</sup>. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, participatory observation and office visits, as well as many informal observations and conversations while being fully immersed in the setting. The first author's appreciation of the broader Kenyan context was informed by having previously worked in the nonprofit sector in Kenya.

We began formal interviews at prominent sites, such as the iHUB, iLab, GrowthHub and 88mph, and mostly spoke with the more visible people in the field. Our initial interview protocol focused on interviewees' daily work schedules, most pressing tasks and relationships, and problem-solving approaches. We used snowball sampling and our own online research to add interviewees, and during later stages switched to using theoretical sampling informed by emergent insights (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). Our sample reflects the diversity of participants in

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<sup>6</sup> The first author collected the data during this period. Both authors participated in preliminary analysis during data collection, and jointly performed the subsequent analyses reported below.

the ICT community<sup>7</sup> on characteristics such as their specialization, seniority, venture size, nationality and personal visibility in the sector. In the course of interviewing, we also broadened our protocol toward understanding the wider context and social life of interviewees. In total, we conducted 134 formal interviews, 73 with domestic, repatriate and expatriate entrepreneurs (at companies ranging in age and size from seed stage [with up to 5 employees] to growth stage [with 30 or more employees]), 13 with domestic and international investors (including angel investors and VC or private equity) and 48 with other industry participants (including government officials; incubator, accelerator and co-working space managers; media professionals; donors; and consultant company employees) and corporate representatives (Google, Facebook and Microsoft). Although all of the interviews informed our understanding and the vast majority was audio recorded, we decided to limit our transcription and detailed coding to 77 interviews that produced particularly rich insights. These included many interviews from the second half of the field data collection period. Appendix I details the interviews of this subset.

In addition, we conducted selective interviews with individuals outside of the ICT industry, attended numerous informal events, visited offices, and were present at more than seventeen conferences, workshops, pitch nights, talks and industry events. While collecting data, we worked in a co-working space shared with technology entrepreneurs and investors. We documented our ethnographic data in field notes based on recent data collection.

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<sup>7</sup> Due to media attention some founders carefully manage their visibility and limit their public involvement. We were able to gain access to those individuals mostly towards the end of the field research period.



### 2.5.3. Analysis

Our analytic approach was designed to facilitate inductive theorizing. We primarily followed a process of grounded theory development that involved coding the ethnographic and interview data and using theoretically guided constant comparison during and after data collection (see Charmaz 2011; Clarke 2005; Eisenhardt & Graebner 2007; Glaser & Strauss 2012). We supplemented this approach with more formal interpretive techniques borrowed from structural semiotics, specifically semiotic clustering, semiotic chains and semiotic square analyses (described in detail in Feldman 1995; Manning 1987). Formal semiotic techniques were especially useful after the end of data collection for identifying connections between practices and institutions and for identifying meanings that were not manifest in the texts (e.g., topics and ideas that interviewees were reluctant to name directly).

We developed first-order thematic codes (grouped by our research questions) from detailed coding of a subset of 22 interviews that represented the full range of participants and which had yielded especially rich information. We then refined the initial thematic categories found in this step against the remaining transcribed interviews and used field notes as contextual knowledge to verify the resulting coding scheme for completeness and descriptive fidelity. This process produced the insight that the actors distinguished a “global” way and a “Kenyan” way to solve practical tasks, situational demands and challenges of technology entrepreneurship. These two distinctive cultural repositories, which we came to understand as ready-made templates, co-existed in Kenya’s ICT industry and prescribed different courses of action to participants.

In a second step, we then moved toward theory development at the level of concepts and categories, through axial coding, case comparisons and the semiotic techniques described above. Our use of semiotic analyses was prompted by the initial discovery of the importance that the contrast between local and global notions of entrepreneurship had for participants. Semiotic

systems are organized by deeper cultural codes that amount to comprehensive templates for action (Barley, 1983; Chandler, 2007; Fiol, 1989; Li, 2016; Swidler, 2001; Tavory & Swidler, 2012; Weber, Heinze, & DeSoucey, 2008). Cultural codes often are anchored on binary oppositions, as we also found in the distinction between the Kenyan and global way of performing entrepreneurship. As we started to abstract from the first-order codes, we also engaged in an iterative process of abductive theorizing, moving between empirical material and extant literature to identify tensions and novel theoretical insights (Richardson & Kramer, 2006). By directing our attention to contrasts, we created ideal–typical poles that we came to understand as two alternative and distinct *templates* — a local and global guide for entrepreneurial activity — in which first-order codes and categories, labeled as elements and components, constitute the templates’ content. Ideal–types were particularly helpful, because they provided an interpretive image that guided our thought process in interrelating the key characteristics of entrepreneurial work into a systematic multi-level structure (Thornton, 1999). Thus, the templates are best understood as empirically derived and coherent schematic solution approaches or context-specific rulebooks (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Templates contain prescriptions on how to perform and evaluate roles and scripts (*i.e. know-how*). As follows from our interviews and observations, it is the existence of these two alternatives in our context that gives rise to the tensions and varying strategies of action.

In a third step, we reexamined the same field data with regard to how actors engaged with the templates, the limitations of their engagement and the consequences they experience. We proceeded again through an iteration of concept development with a subset of interviews and then refinement and validation with reference to the remaining interview and contextual data. The final step entailed the development and formalization of a dynamic model of the relationships between the various constructs.

## 2.6. Findings

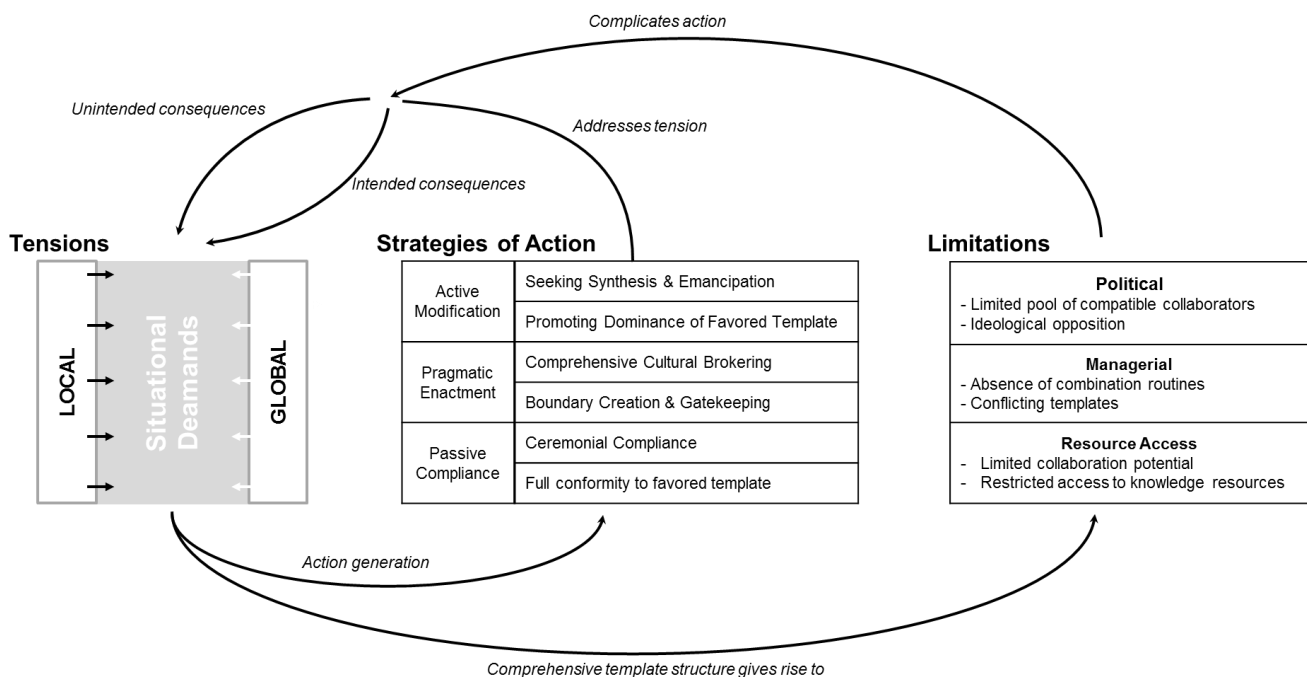
Figure 1 (reading from left to right) summarizes the cyclical process model that resulted from our analyses. In this section, we first offer a brief overview of the model and then report detailed findings and evidence for the components. The model reflects a micro-phenomenological lens of globalization. Its starting points are the manifold situational demands and practical concerns of participants in the Kenyan ICT sector. Situational demands arise from a common goal of entrepreneurial success and a shared infrastructure of roles, organizations and rituals — the “know what” of technology entrepreneurship. Common tasks, such as developing products or transacting with investors and employees, prompt action. The cultural infrastructure around these tasks include common rituals such as pitch nights, hackathons and failure conference, language with terms like “staying lean,” “customer retention rate” and “KPIs” (key performance indicators) and actor roles such as founder, entrepreneur-in-residence, investment manager, CEO and CTO.

It is the entrepreneurship templates that specify appropriate ways in which to best address situational demands and carry out practical tasks — again, the “know-how” of performing roles and rituals. These templates provide recipes for how to solve a situational demand, such as how to become a competent entrepreneur, how to realize a venture’s growth potential or how best to work with strategic partners. They are also the basis of interpersonal expectation management, as others’ interpret and evaluate actions based on the ideals embodied in the respective template. Complexity is introduced as more than one template affects a participant’s action in a given domain. Strikingly, we found that participants recognized a “local Kenyan entrepreneurship template” and a “global technology entrepreneurship template” and that they perceived the action guidelines contained in these two templates to often be incompatible. Hence the two alternative templates generated tension about how to best perform roles and tasks. Actors addressed these

tensions not so much in the abstract but at the level of practice, through a set of six distinctive strategies of action (Swidler, 1986) — emergent general approaches for pursuing their goal of being competent entrepreneurs, investors, consultants, mentors, etc., in light of the co-existence of alternative and incompatible prescriptions.

Yet the encompassing nature of the templates and the interdependence of elements within them limited the effectiveness of any particular strategy of action for resolving the tensions between local and global recipes. For example, while participants could use different elements of the templates in a form of bricolage to construct lines of action (Baker & Nelson, 2005), it was the systemic integration of elements and components into a holistic template structure that gave rise to limitations and unintended consequences. Together, intended and unintended consequences created new problems and situational demands that called for renewed action, which were again subject to tensions. This produces the cyclical nature of the process model depicted in figure 1, which construes globalization as an emergent and ongoing process.

**Figure 1 Process Model**

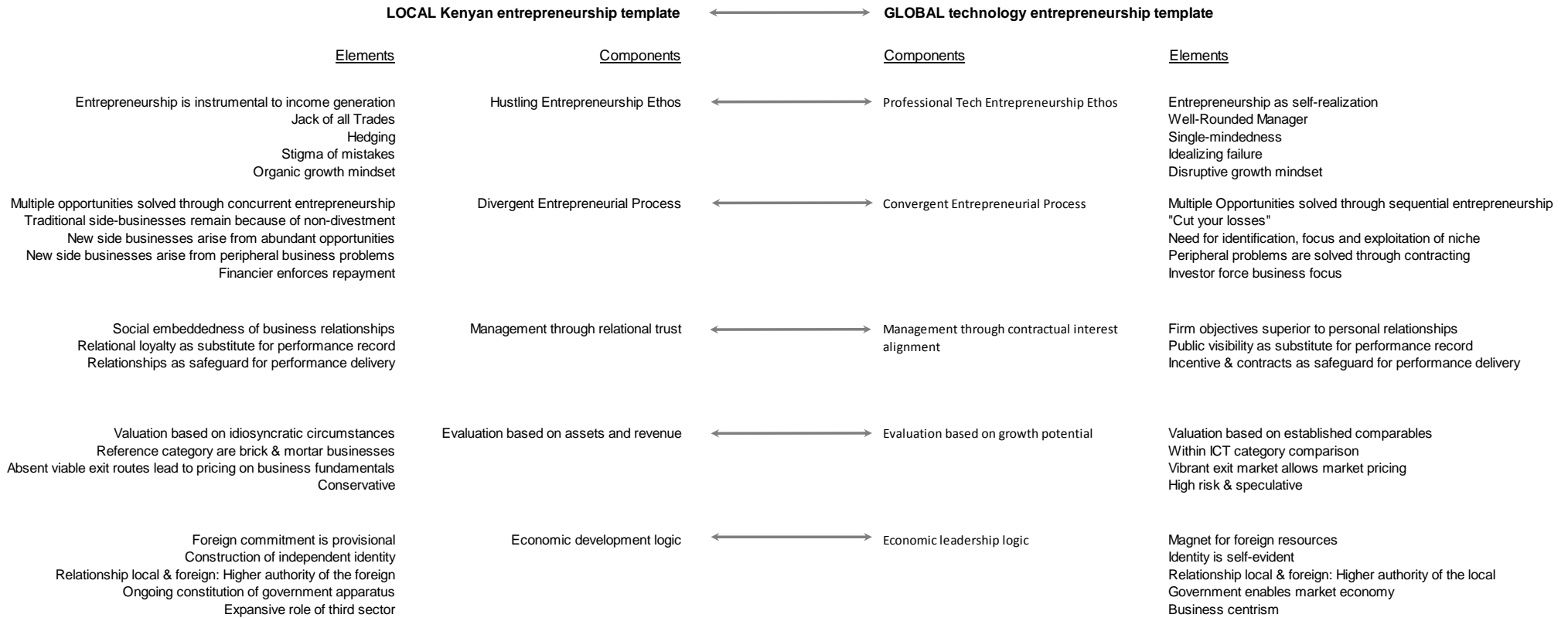


### **2.6.1. Templates: Local Kenyan entrepreneurship and global technology entrepreneurship**

Local participants constructed the templates' content in reference and opposition to each other, giving rise to two largely incompatible templates. The "local" template is grounded in a collective Kenyan identity based on place, collective memory, history and institutional constellations. Because of the nascence of the sector, a unique Kenyan technology entrepreneurship template has yet to emerge. The label "global" emanates from the awareness that participants see "the sense of community and openness in tech and people helping each other as a real global phenomenon" (expatriate entrepreneur, E51).

Through our analysis, we identified five interdependent components of the templates (see Figure 2): individual qualities (ethos), entrepreneurial process, relationship management, capital market and institutional environment. The fifth component, depictions of the larger institutional environment, is part of the template in the form of often implicit and untested assumptions about environmental conditions, such as market maturity, infrastructure, organizational forms, regulations and normative rules. Such assumptions condition more concrete template components. For instance, economic development logic in the local Kenyan entrepreneurship template entails assumptions about the role of the third sector (relevant) and the permanence of foreign actors' commitments (unreliable). Such assumptions affect participants' preferred organizational forms (e.g., hybrid, commercial or NGO), funding models (e.g., grants, loans or crowdsourcing) and investor relationships (e.g., active, passive, commercial or social investors). Each component consists of three to five elements. The components and elements shown in figure 2 depict the themes most salient to participants in Kenya's ICT industry during the time period of the empirical investigation and may not reflect full institutional realities. Appendices II A–E show more fine-grained descriptions of the elements in each component, with sub-categories

**Figure 2: Meaning Structure of Local and Global Entrepreneurship Templates**



from our coding. They also include examples of manifest empirical markers we used to identify categories and corresponding evidence in the form of observations, vignettes and interviews. For brevity's sake, we offer only an abridged narrative description of each component and reference the information contained in the tables and in Appendices II A–E.

### **2.6.2. Hustling entrepreneurship ethos versus professional tech entrepreneurship ethos**

Appendix II-A details the characteristics of the ethos within each template. We use the term ethos to capture the “tone, character, and quality of life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; [a people’s ethos is] the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects” (Geertz, 1957: 421). In Kenya, “hustling,” as it is called, is a widely recognized archetype that transcends class and ethnicity and is not limited to entrepreneurs in either the formal or informal economy. The term evokes the imagery of a jack of all trades that benefits from brokerage (“having connections”) and expertise across industries. The archetypical hustler is a notorious hedger and therefore pursues multiple engagements across a variety of industries at the same time, with the ultimate goal of weaving together a resilient safety net that guarantees a minimum level of income and protects against external shocks. The dependence on networks and relationships for success produces an ethical stance in which, for instance, interpersonal trust is cultivated through personal favors, ethnic lineage, informal arrangements and obedience to higher-status individuals. Failure puts an important asset on the line — one’s reputation — that must be protected. Consequently, the ethos of the Kenyan template makes failure undesirable and leads to active failure-avoidance behaviors as well as tactical reframing of failures into the incompetence of the “other.” As a logical consequence, the ethos of hustling entrepreneurship

prizes a conservative, risk-averse and highly socially embedded actor that evades third-party scrutiny and unnecessary public visibility.

Industry participants understand the ethos of the global template as being in opposition to hustling and instead anchored in a distinctly professional notion of entrepreneurship, with its own standards and guidelines for action. The professional technology entrepreneurship ethos emphasizes the capabilities of the individual and professional discipline. It construes entrepreneurship as an emancipatory and emotional journey that leads towards self-realization and personal development. As an entrepreneur put it, “At the end of the day, it’s you yourself, what are you able to do...the environment has made me disadvantaged because I am Kenyan or because I come from this background, now that’s all crap...you have everything, you go work on it” (Kenyan entrepreneur, E50). In its ideal form the entrepreneur becomes a well-rounded manager whose authority rests on expertise rather than seniority because “if you are trained in a start-up, you learn everything. You learn not just one thing, you don’t specialize in anything” (expatriate industry expert, X5). The global template also suggests that those with a single-minded focus on one business succeed and that the enterprise must take absolute priority: “You need to work smart. You need to work hard, and you need to work long, and you need to sacrifice, so basically taking no money out of the business!” (Kenyan entrepreneur, E22). The possibility of business (and hence personal) failure are considered to be normal and an integral source for learning rather than a sign of poor ability or unreliability. “You invest in a lot of different things and you expect most of it to go wrong, but you know it’s kind of part fact-finding, part building networks, part meeting entrepreneurs, part exploring options and a little part of it, you know, maybe actually works out one day” (expatriate investor, I8). A bold vision and disruptive growth mindset go hand in hand with this acceptance of failure. Success that is realized by following these prescriptions is celebrated and serves as an archetype for this ethos.



As a Kenyan entrepreneur put it, “A lot of the industry guns, when I meet them, they always tell me that [my company (which embraces these prescriptions)] inspired a lot of what they are doing today, to go out and to be entrepreneurs and to be innovators” (Kenyan entrepreneur, E22).

### **2.6.3. Divergent entrepreneurial process versus convergent entrepreneurial process**

In addition to an ethos of entrepreneurial actors, each template also includes a stylized process for developing enterprises, with implications for enterprise growth and scope. At the heart of this template component is the question of how to respond to multiple entrepreneurial opportunities. The local Kenyan template favors a divergent entrepreneurial process, in which multiple opportunities prompt the concurrent pursuit of several, often unrelated “side-businesses” (see Appendix II-B). Entrepreneurs should entertain a varied portfolio of businesses or engagements and start new ones when opportunities present themselves. As an expatriate industry expert (X9) described it, “We have all these things on the side, I am a Director in, is it twelve companies or something like that, so I mean I do act out my entrepreneurial self in those companies.” Several factors contribute to this pattern. One source of divergence is the necessity to solve peripheral business problems that arise in the course of an initial enterprise by way of additional ventures rather than through contracting. A common reason is lacking infrastructure for an ICT enterprise. For example, as explained by a repatriate entrepreneur (E11), “In the US, they just assume that there is a supply chain...In this market we had to build one.” Establishing side-businesses alongside an initial venture is thus often in the service of a core business, even when the side-business is unrelated in terms of industry, such as web applications and delivery services in the above example. Problems at the periphery of an industry thus generate opportunities that configure a new market (Dhanaraj & Khanna, 2011; Mair, Marti, & Ventresca, 2012). A second source of divergence is the perceived abundance of unmet needs in Kenya and limited

competitive density, so that many attractive opportunities exist at any point in time. This relative abundance surfaces in assessments, such as, “Nothing has been done yet. Infrastructure is still behind; software services, financial services, health care. There’s so much that can be done in Africa” (repatriate entrepreneur, E21). Once created, side-businesses are unlikely to be divested; and instead remain in the entrepreneur’s portfolio. Divestment is strongly discouraged, because multiple endeavors are viewed positively and are regarded as a resource buffer for hedging risk, in line with the hustling ethos. Traditional businesses, especially, also signify a bond to a historically agrarian society, in which “Agriculture is the easiest. They [my peers] are like, ‘Yeah, I’m doing something like a chicken farm, in the middle of nowhere. So if you hear anybody looking for about 200 or 300 chickens or quails, let me know’” (repatriate entrepreneur, E13). In contrast to North American models of entrepreneurship, this portfolio diversification happens at the level of the entrepreneur, not the investor, not least because Kenyan investors are more concerned about securing repayment on each investments than on active direction-setting for the business or on balancing portfolio-level risk returns.

The perceived global template offers sequential entrepreneurship as an alternative to address multiple opportunities. The imagery is one of an entrepreneur who singles out one opportunity among many and devotes full attention to its exploitation but also exits the venture at some stage of development. Significant modifications in the business model or shifting to a new idea are understood as “pivoting” — a rapid transition from one model to another rather than the parallel development of a second business. Diversification is generally frowned upon, and evaluations of opportunities are driven by fit with a core competence rather than by their general attractiveness. The rationale is captured well by the following remarks:

“What do I know about real estate, and what do I know about all this other stuff? Nothing, really! I can’t have any scarce knowledge. But in technology...I can build very specific, deep insights that are scarce. And as a result of that, I can charge a premium or spend time in developing opportunities and ideas...[so] that it puts me in a reasonable position to succeed.” (Kenyan entrepreneur, E22)

According to the global template, peripheral problems, such as logistics, marketing or financing, can and should be outsourced to other firms (Astley, 1985; Barnett & Carroll, 1987) and fledgling ventures should be sold or terminated to “cut the losses” and move on. And the industry’s opportunity space is presumed to be competitively crowded, with time-based competition over narrow niches, so that only singularly focusing on one business promises competitive success. Investors in this template reinforce this entrepreneurial process by shifting financial risk at the portfolio level, where focused businesses are easier to manage than diversified ones (Thornton, 1999). These investors are “that little voice of sanity that creates some level of accountability for the entrepreneur” (Kenyan entrepreneur, E22), who “only invest in things that can scale massively” (repatriate industry expert, X14).

#### **2.6.4. Management through relational trust versus management through contractual interest alignment**

Both templates also include principles for managing relationships with employees, investors, suppliers, and others (see Appendix II-C for details). This template component addresses an elementary organizational question: how best to elicit cooperation and performance from others. Relationship approaches have been described as a key difference between Western management practices and alternatives in the Global South (Fukuyama, 1996), such as *guanxi* in China (Xiao & Tsui, 2007) and *ubuntu* in South Africa (Lutz, 2009). In the local Kenyan entrepreneurship template, business transactions are relational, and a high degree of social embeddedness in business relationships is pivotal. The belief is that “in building the social first, the business will always come later” (Kenyan industry expert, X18). While the use of referrals, for example, is common practice in many industries and countries, in this template the trust and loyalty specifically from *embedded* relationships is believed to be a key asset to reach business goals.

Only they can act as safeguards against shirking performance and can substitute for a lack of professional experience and skills in the other party. The quality of second- and third-degree referrals determines, for instance, access to qualified job candidates and their subsequent commitment to perform as an obligation to their sponsor, not just the employer. Adherents of this template believe that “it’s much more important to have the people you work with be people that you trust and people that you’re comfortable working with than necessarily having somebody that has the right training” (expatriate entrepreneur, E2). Formal contracts, comprehensive performance goals and clearly defined incentive packages are negligible instruments that undermine the relational view. A consequence of this relational logic is the use of (business) resources to assemble a robust personal network and satisfy obligations by way of relationships, even when doing so does not immediately benefit the organization.

The global technology entrepreneurship template postulates a stricter separation between business and personal relationships and emphasizes other mechanisms to facilitate economic exchanges, enhance commitments and ensure performance. Specifically, contracts are considered a necessary and in fact the preferred institution for aligning interest and gaining cooperation. This is because people are believed to act on their own interests, not out of a sense of obligation to others. To separate organizational and personal concerns and prioritize business considerations in enterprise transactions, one thus needs “a structure of accountability” (Kenyan entrepreneur, E22) and a culture of “objective evaluation” (Kenyan investor, I7). Interest alignment through contracts and incentive systems (e.g., pay-for-performance, premiums or equity-based compensation) are taken to be the superior mechanisms for coordinating stakeholders, such as investors, entrepreneurs or employees, while informal social obligations and close relationships are seen as inefficient and “cronyism.” Public reputation and transparency substitute for close relationships as a heuristic for assessing skill and monitoring commitment. Public reputation,

rather than personal endorsements, is supposed to signify professionalism and directs attention to “somebody who has real incentive” (expatriate investor, I8). The global template thus rewards self-promotion through social media and strategic self-branding in order to “establish an identity...[and] differentiate yourself from the others” (expatriate corporate representative, X1).

### **2.6.5. Evaluation based on assets and revenue versus evaluation based on growth potential**

Because the evaluation of early-stage ventures by possible investors and other stakeholders is an important part of entrepreneurship (Ferrary & Granovetter, 2009), the standards and routines of financing decisions thus show up in both templates (see Appendix II-D). Investors decide which “ideas” receive funding and on which terms, thereby having a profound impact on entrepreneurial action. According to the local Kenyan template, the reference categories for investment in ICT businesses are brick-and-mortar businesses, defined by tangible assets and existing revenue, with real estate, property development, and agriculture as being widely recognized as investment opportunities. The intangible and speculative sources of value often found in the ICT sector are to be treated with suspicion, and exit options, such as acquisitions or initial public offerings (IPOs), are considered rare exceptions and not part of a realistic valuation. Investors that follow this template mainly “want to invest in a company with revenue that will grow out twenty to thirty percent” (repatriate entrepreneur, E21), thereby mirroring the conservative revenue-based growth model of the hustling entrepreneurship ethos. To the extent that investments are placed in ICT ventures, valuations are based on idiosyncratic characteristics of the firms and are not subject to either standard metrics or intensive negotiations. In fact, a “take it or leave it” offer is most common. The evaluation approaches are premised on investors who invest across sectors and hence prefer inter-sectoral comparability. Formal and informal loans are a common financing

mechanisms, serviced by banks as well as the highly prevalent savings-and-investment clubs known in Kenya as chamas or SACCOs (savings and credit cooperative organizations) (for more information, see Kenya Association of Investment Groups 2014). Overall, the capital market component of this template reflects a conservative and diversified investment and entrepreneurial strategy that contrasts ICT ventures with brick-and-mortar business models.

The global technology template offers an alternative approach to evaluating technology enterprises. In this template, ICT is regarded as a distinct category with unique standards and investment practices, shielding investment evaluations in the sector from comparisons with other sectors. Specialized metrics, such as user growth, conversion rates or unique visitors per month, are seen as indicators of the future value of a company that at the time of evaluation create no or little revenue. The template's rationale is believed to be to strategically grow ventures' market attractiveness in a short time span (less than 10 years) in order to "exit" through either an acquisition or an IPO (see Thornton 1999). Valuations are therefore more speculative in the sense that they take into account not only the ability of the venture to grow exponentially but also subsequent investors' expected willingness to pay. This template assumes an existing population of specialized investment organizations. In particular, VC funds, angel investors and accelerators that specialize in the ICT sector promote externally financed high-growth strategies and are well versed in so called "spray and pray" investment approaches that lead to highly diversified intra-sector investment strategies. One of the implicit conditions built into this valuation approach is the existence of an efficient and specialized capital market infrastructure (see also Ferrary & Granovetter 2009; Saxenian 1994).

### **2.6.6. Economic development logic versus economic leadership logic**

The fifth template component reflects important but often untested assumptions about the broader institutional environment of the ICT industry (see Appendix II-E). The local Kenyan entrepreneurship template situates technology entrepreneurship in an economic development logic, which implies aspirations to emulate and learn from an external reference system and a self-image as positioned in a transitional local environment at the periphery of the international economy. This template attributes high status to international forms of entrepreneurship but also represents them as “foreign,” as epitomized by terms such as “the U.S. model in Kenya” (expatriate investor, I4). The template includes a tendency to build and assert an independent identity that is, however, defined primarily in reference to and contrast with the international “other.” In the words of a repatriate entrepreneur, “We listen to all these brilliant guys from Silicon Valley and all that stuff — Peter Thiel, all these guys. Brilliant! But you have to listen to what they are saying and then you Africanize it” (repatriate entrepreneur, E21). Statements such as the marketing slogans “Designed in Kenya and made in the USA” or “If it works in Africa it will work anywhere”<sup>8</sup> illustrate attempts to carve out a Kenyan or African identity and emphasize a unique historical “Afro-moment” of identity assertion through difference. Thus, while the “global” has high status, it is also seen as an “other,” distinct from a local identity. Another defining characteristic of the economic development logic is the expansive role of the third sector, which permeates entrepreneurial activity and affects decision-making about, for instance, organizational forms (e.g., hybrid, commercial and welfare organizations), funding models (e.g., grant, loan, equity and crowdsourcing) and target market (e.g., bottom of the pyramid, middle-income or luxury goods). Charitable and welfare organizations transcend sector boundaries and

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<sup>8</sup> Marketing slogans developed by the Kenyan company BRCK [www.brck.com](http://www.brck.com)

subtly infuse private sector activity with standards, values and objectives emanating from the third sector (Marchant, 2016). It creates an environment in which charity and commerce are tightly intertwined.

By implication then, the commitments of foreign investors, NGOs and entrepreneurs are seen as inherently provisional, because they remain foreign and because they are assumed to have access to many other opportunities, so that their local involvement is episodic and dependent solely on success. Historical fluctuations in the influx of resources and the admitted motivation of many foreign participants to “test the waters in Kenya” (expatriate investor, I4) are seen as evidence of this fickleness. Conversely, local institutions, such as governments and the organizational infrastructure of the industry, are seen as emergent rather than settled and as unreliable. As a repatriate entrepreneur (E13) explained about bending the rules, “I know the fact that you getting away with it simply depends upon how deep your pockets are.” Against this backdrop, a hustling entrepreneurship ethos, divergent entrepreneurial process and conservative evaluation approach make sense as recipes for generating and safeguarding income in an emergent and transitional environment. And the externally directed attention for identifying novel ideas implies that new business opportunities and technological solutions can be easily identified abroad and in other sectors, supporting the assumption of abundant opportunities in the divergent entrepreneurial process. Being resilient in this logic begs the question of “What do we have going to make sure that if this job goes away [that] there is something else” (expatriate investor, I2).

The global template assumes a contrasting institutional configuration. It depicts an economic leadership logic, in which economic success, technological leadership and avant-garde innovation put members in a central position in the national and international economy. This superiority is believed to be created from “within” the community, through local talent, intense competition and peer-to-peer learning. The component thus emphasizes an internally focused



reference system of local peers, with “others” primarily learning and imitating from those participating in the core. The assumption of superiority built into the economic leadership logic lends legitimacy to claiming technology entrepreneurship as a professional endeavor and allows the propagation of practices as global standards, models and benchmarks. Identity construction is primarily self-referential and does not derive from differentiating the local community from an “other.” The most powerful and innovative local and international actors are assumed to be attracted to the ICT sector, making disruptive growth models with delayed revenue generation an appropriate ambition and justifying speculative investments. Government is portrayed as an actor that acknowledges the centrality of technology enterprises for economic growth and supports the eco-system by “reducing friction” (repatriate industry expert, X14) through friendly regulations, tax exemptions and investment in research. It also follows that market based and entrepreneurial solutions developed in this most advanced part of the economy will change the world and are most suitable to address societal problems. Such beliefs nurture the view that business approaches deliver superior solutions because “In a well-functioning state, NGOs wouldn’t exist. NGOs are simply not needed. There is a limited role for them because the market answers most of the problems and the government should answer the rest” (repatriate industry expert, X14).

#### **2.6.7. Tension between the templates**

These two templates not only assume different environmental configurations but also prescribe alternative courses of action for many concrete entrepreneurial tasks. In a heterogeneous setting like the Kenyan ICT sector, the presence of both templates creates tensions, because the practices suggested by prescription, such as divergent or convergent entrepreneurial processes, cannot be simultaneously implemented. This tension frustrates participants in search of the right way to perform technology entrepreneurship. For instance, a dominant theme in Kenya’s ICT sector

concerns the applicability of the “hustling entrepreneurship ethos” and the “divergent entrepreneurial process” in scaling technology enterprises. An expatriate entrepreneur (E18) vividly illustrated the difficulty of following both guidelines:

“If you focus on revenue and you are doing the consulting thing on the side [i.e., side-business], you are moving at fifty percent [of] your pace in the best case. And so someone then that’s moving at a hundred percent pace with pure focus is going to outdo you.”

The prescriptions of the Kenyan entrepreneurship template thus appear ill suited for growing a globally competitive technology enterprise. The path to success seems evident within the global template, though requiring single-mindedness and growth capital. As the same expatriate entrepreneur (E18) readily described,

“[You] get series A capital to start delivering scale, get series B capital to really take it beyond Kenya, and if those processes are known and discreet and people can see that their peers have gone through those processes, then it would be easier for them to take that leap of faith and say, ‘I am just going to focus on this [one venture]. I am going to focus on traction and I am going to *assume* that if I hit traction and I am doing well, that there will be money waiting for me on the other side” (emphasis added).

However, the evaluation principles of many investors, expectations from stakeholders and the local institutional context in Kenya limit the availability of early stage capital and the viability of rapid growth models. This makes the promises of the global template appear as doubtful as those of the local template and makes the singular strategy described by the interviewee seem irrational or inaccessible to many entrepreneurs. Consequently, participants in the Kenyan ICT sector lack unambiguous guidance about how to approach the very basic tasks of performing technology entrepreneurship with an expectation of success. Because no template for developing technology enterprises has yet been strongly institutionalized, “There is no one who can tell you [that] they are an expert in African tech” (repatriate entrepreneur, E21).

## **2.7. Strategies of Action**

Although participants in Kenya’s ICT sector share the goal of growing competitive technology enterprises and are enmeshed in commonly understood tasks of technology entrepreneurship, the

tensions between the local and global templates create problems and ambiguities that must be resolved at the level of practice. We thus seek to understand, *How do actors in the locale engage with the global and local templates in practice?* From our analysis, we identified six basic strategies of action for addressing the tensions, summarized in Table 1 with empirical illustrations. Strategies of action are general approaches for pursuing goals in practice that entail recurrent selections from a diverse cultural toolkit (Swidler, 1986). Constructing a strategy of action means that certain template elements are retrieved, assembled into a line of action and directed at accomplishing the entrepreneurial goal while addressing the situational demands of a task. The strategies of action in our study were mostly emergent, arising from recurrent situational choices rather than from well-articulated ideologies. The toolkits and action strategies of the vast majority of participants in the sector are not designed to intentionally maintain or change a particular institution (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009), they are rather a pragmatic solution approach in response to situational demands. We grouped each strategy of action into three higher-order categories that represent different forms of engagement with the template material — passive compliance, pragmatic enactment and active modification. Passive compliance strategies of action treat templates as given and truly incompatible, so that no integration is attempted. Pragmatic enactment strategies recognize the tension between the templates but attempt to take advantage of these differences by recombining elements in a pragmatic way for individual benefit. Active modification strategies also acknowledge the tension between the templates but seek to change the relationship between them by promoting either synthesis or dominance.

**Table 1: Action Repertoire and Empirical Illustrations**

Higher-order categories	1st-order codes	Empirical markers and illustrations
Active Modification	Seeking Synthesis & Emancipation	Africapitalism; theorization of practices in connection to an African identity project; alteration of existing practices; unprecedented organizational design, e.g., synthesis of domestic saving and investment clubs (i.e., chamas) with international finance institutions (i.e., venture capital and private equity); "Why don't we do it for ourselves?...It is my personal belief that the economies grow from indigenous funds as well" (I7); development of new entrepreneurial archetype e.g. applying strategic alignment to side-hustles
	Promoting Dominance of Favored Template	Indoctrination; preaching; outspoken; leading by example; "my way is your way too;" mentoring; active investor; media activity; visibility in professional community; open office infrastructure; open display of business strategy; visibility of salary scale to all employees; "It's a very deep discussion on what makes entrepreneurs, and that's a cause that's very dear to my heart. It's also for me, one of the things that drives me in terms to succeed. I'm not driven by money, but I'm driven by the fact that in this market, and in Africa, that we need visible figureheads who have created immense wealth by working; not stealing, not doing government deals, but by just working." (E22)
Pragmatic Enactment	Comprehensive Cultural Brokering	Information & resource flow integration; combining the best of both worlds; understanding value of both templates; pragmatic combination of professional tech entrepreneur ethos & hustling entrepreneurship ethos, e.g. "I'm not a true entrepreneur until I've stepped away from a little bit of the safety net and I'm spending a majority of my time, over fifty percent of my time, pursuing this path." (X14); sequential attention grant & equity funding model; translation work, e.g. "You see, there's no one who can tell you they are an expert in Africa tech. We listen to all these brilliant guys from Silicon Valley and all that stuff, Peter Thiel, all these guys. Brilliant. But you have to listen to what they are saying and then you Africanize it." (E21)
	Boundary Creation & Gatekeeping	Information & resource flow separation; two separate worlds; adherence to both templates in parallel e.g. on operational level relational hiring and on strategy level full compliance to aggressive growth trajectory; withholding information & resources, e.g. differing narratives depending on audience, "[Investor with local experience] said, "Do you think he's got some silent partner that's angry?" This investor has been doing business [here] for a while. If I talk that out with [international investor], that would freak [international investor] out....He would be like, "Wow. What?" (E12)
Passive Compliance	Ceremonial Compliance	Discourse vs practice, incoherence between public display and actual practice e.g. teaching business planning guidelines "So they [expatriate mentors] think they're giving them a framework [business plan] for them to go home and analyse. What they [entrepreneurs] are hearing is, 'Ah, he is giving me all the answers, right?! 'Note down here, that's my answer....I am done. And then it doesn't become a process" (X9), "Are you looking at a strategic buyout ? Do you really ever think about that? Interviewee: Totally clueless. We put stuff like that in our proposals to make investors happy but right now...trying to see what the future has to hold." (E21)
	Full conformity to favored template	"I do it my way or no way;" clear principles; strict; rigid, e.g. "You don't invest in them unless they quit their job" (I2); does not relate to practices associated with other template, e.g. "Because they [foreigners] don't understand our market" (X10); adherence to the evaluation, interpretation and practices of one template only, e.g., "So my biggest struggle was to come here and say I'm not going to rely on any family connection. It's my own capabilities to say I'm going to build a company." (E13)

The strategies of action shown in table 1 are generic types and should not be attributed to one single individual. The use of these strategies of action at the actor level is often influenced by the particular intended end (Swidler, 1986). Participants' skill and resources vary, of course, as a result of which individuals have access to smaller or larger individual action repertoires

(Fligstein, 1997). Because the objective of the current study was to develop a dynamic model at the aggregate level, we do not discuss such individual variations in this paper.

Although the intended consequence of all strategies of action is to reconcile tensions between templates, they also generate unintended consequences (Merton, 1936), which we also describe below. In fact, the multi-layered and comprehensive nature of each template limits the effectiveness of any strategy of action, so that tensions are never fully resolved but give rise to new problems that demand renewed action.

### **2.7.1. Passive Compliance Strategies**

#### *2.7.1.1. Full conformity to favored template*

One way to address the tension between templates is to adhere closely to only one of them. The preferred template becomes the unquestioned default and is followed with full conviction, either because the actor is unaware of alternatives, purposefully ignores them, or rejects them. We found that one consequence of this approach is to avoid interactions with participants who subscribe to the other template of entrepreneurship and who are thus seen as difficult to deal with. For example, managers may not want to cooperate with partners subscribing to the global template, because of a view that “they [foreigners] don’t understand our market” (repatriate corporate representative, X10). Similarly, investors may take the approach that “you don’t invest in them [entrepreneurs], unless they quit their other job [side-hustles]” (expatriate investor). Although this strategy accomplishes the intended goal of resolving tensions between alternative templates, it also generates unintended consequences. For example, entrepreneurs who saw themselves as hustlers and concurrently pursued multiple opportunities had to forego access to some funding opportunities and ended up with a smaller pool of investors and a reduced learning

potential from such relationships. This strategy of action thus makes success more difficult in a mixed sector that blends local and global resources and where few other actors take a similarly purist stance. The approach does therefore not so much resolve the tension between templates but restricts the discretion of the actor by delimiting interaction and relationship alternatives.

#### *2.7.1.2. Ceremonial compliance*

We found that consistent adherence to one template in practice was at times combined with conscious gestures of compliance with the other template that did, however, not guide actual practices. The rationale cited for this approach was often to overcome the limitation of full conformity and to access resources that only the opposing template could offer. This strategy of action requires at least surface familiarity with the other template, but it retains the focus on only one template for guiding action. The second template is used in a qualitatively different way, instrumentally and as an afterthought of action, rather than as generative guidance.

This strategy can be readily observed in accelerator or incubator programs that include classes on entrepreneurial business plans and employ elements of the global template, such as the “lean startup model” or “business model canvas” methodologies. These business planning and strategy methodologies are devices designed to embody ideas of the “professional entrepreneurship ethos” and “convergent entrepreneurial process”: to fine-tune the vision, practices and routines of an organization in order to deliver value to the customer, organize around a core competence and drive rapid scaling. Yet participating entrepreneurs who viewed entrepreneurship chiefly as a means of generating income and thus subscribed to a hustling ethos and divergent growth often only fulfilled the surface requirements of the program, with the rationale that going through the motions will unlock resources, such as access to investors and network contacts for referrals. They did not engage with the deeper logic behind the exercises,

treating them not as tools to structure their thinking but as purely instrumental ceremonies. A similar approach was often taken by local entrepreneurs in negotiations with investors who subscribed to the global template. Strategic exit options are an important part of the global template, while the local template does not consider acquisitions and IPOs, but long-term stability. As stated by a repatriate entrepreneur (E21), “We put stuff like that [acquisition goals and projections] in our proposals to make investors happy” even though the venture’s overall business strategy was not designed to become an attractive acquisition target and instead focused on steady revenue generation.

Although ceremonial compliance is often intended to alleviate the drawback of full conformity — foregone alternative lines of action, cooperation partners and resources — our data suggest that it also does not resolve the tension between the local and global templates and rather generates unintended effects. In fact, future conflict is a likely scenario, in which, for example, expectations between investors and entrepreneurs about the strategy of the enterprise diverge significantly, leading to severe repercussions for the venture’s future performance and reputation (Collewaert, 2012; Collewaert & Fassin, 2011). This strategy of action only accesses knowledge of the more stylized elements of the alternative template and thus does not foster learning, facilitate the associated expansion of action options or permit recombination opportunities. For example, adherents of the global template were cognizant of the prescription for “social embeddedness of business relationships” in Kenya and the need to develop social networks in order to access crucial resources. Many expatriate investors and entrepreneurs thus tried to comply with this prescription and engaged in networking. They were, however, not willing to change their business decisions, such as in hiring or partnering to signal their full entanglement with the local template. In consequence, they remained culturally too insular to form profound local knowledge. Common catch phrases, such as living in an “expat bubble,” the “no local co-

founder” syndrome, and persistent language and cultural barriers strikingly illustrate this limitation (Judd, 2013). In sum, although ceremonial compliance signals the recognition of a secondary template, it does not resolve tensions at the level of practice and generates new situational demands by limiting long-term access to knowledge resources and by generating sources of conflict among stakeholders.

## **2.7.2. Pragmatic Enactment Strategies**

### *2.7.2.1. Boundary creation and gatekeeping*

Strategies of action that are based on the pragmatic enactment of templates recognize the differences and tensions between templates with attempts to combine prescriptions at the practice level. These lines of action are pragmatically driven in that the prescriptions are treated as being akin to cultural toolkits with agency for idiosyncratic selections and recombinations. Our field data showed one approach to be the compartmentalization of action through the creation and maintenance of boundaries. Entrepreneurs and other actors separate organizational routines and information flows so that stakeholders who subscribe to one specific template can be managed separately.

Examples are organizational solutions such as dividing a venture into nonprofit and commercial sub-units in order to receive grant and equity capital, respectively, keeping the two investor types separate and trying to prevent critical interpretations from investors subscribing to the global template that “the business model is almost [seen as] an NGO” (expatriate investor, I6). Similarly, the process for hiring and motivating staff can draw on either relational trust or contractual mechanisms. But these alternative approaches can be combined when applied to different groups of employees who do not compare themselves with each other. Hence, in one



enterprise, the general hiring policy was to use job profiles, credentials, public job advertisement, financial incentive systems and contractual arrangements compatible with the global template. Hiring of executive staff, however, presented an exception to the rule, where relational trust and referral-based loyalty were deemed more important so that hiring drew mostly on socially embedded networks. This approach requires the entrepreneur to act as an active gatekeeper, working to keep information and relationships separate. An expatriate entrepreneur offered the example of a delicate and potentially hazardous situation that involved a government actor and required immediate action. As prescribed by the local template, personal relationships were strategically used to manage the threat without violating expectations of international investors, who would gauge such entanglements as being contrary to the principles of the global template. The entrepreneur (E12) deliberately kept quiet to some investors about “some weird, silent government partner that might be flexing shoulders,” knowing that “if I talk that out with [international investor X], that would freak [international investor X] out.”

The intended consequence of this strategy of action is to overcome the main limitations of the passive compliance approaches, namely the reduced pool of resource holders when adhering to only one template and the narrower repertoire of problem-solving approaches. However, compartmentalizing inconsistent actions does not truly settle the tension between the templates and thus adds the need to continuously and actively manage information and relationships to avoid clashes. As an action strategy, this approach is therefore inherently unstable and relies on continued effort and skill. In the example of political relationships above, followers of the global template, such as investors from abroad, interpret the entanglements and subsequent actions as nontransparent, unprofessional and not aligned with company objectives, which generates the need for careful information management and opens the possibility for future conflict when the compartmentalization fails. In sum, pragmatically enacting elements of both templates through

boundary creation does afford some of the advantages associated with bricolage but complicates the creation of stable routines and increases the reliance on personal skills and the need for ongoing active management.

#### *2.7.2.2. Comprehensive cultural brokering*

Another form of pragmatic enactment is to combine elements from both templates by attempting to integrate resources and information. The intended outcome is again to access a wider resource pool in a heterogeneous environment and to identify more creative solutions to common entrepreneurial tasks. But rather than keeping stakeholder and expectations separate, this strategy of action seeks ways in which they can be combined to the satisfaction of adherents of both templates. An example is the sequential use of grant and equity capital investments for developing an enterprise. The two evaluation views associated with these sources of capital are reconciled to the extent that NGO grant-makers and VCs know of the other's involvement but are made to see the advantage of the other for furthering their own goals. As a successful Kenyan entrepreneur explained the recipe, "The first year, get the grant money because you want to focus on users to test. Grant money is good for testing, but once you've reached the point whereby your start-up needs to breathe and move to the business level, run for the VC money. You get a better valuation and you [can] search for more money, for less equity" (Kenyan entrepreneur, E19). Such integration requires grant providers to see the benefits of scaling up and monetizing socially beneficial solutions through the injection of equity capital and requires VCs to accept the ventures' purpose as not incompatible with "pure" business imperatives. The feasibility of this action strategy thus depends on stakeholder flexibility and, most importantly, the unique skill and resources of the entrepreneur to engage with the rationales of both templates — in other words, on the cultural brokering of agreements between parties with discrepant expectations.

Comprehensive cultural brokerage is, however, not without risk. For example, the receipt of large equity capital investments can be interpreted from the vantage point of the local template simply as a source of income and not as a necessary means tied to the end of rapid scaling and industry transformation. An expatriate entrepreneur (E18) reflected on the risks of not creating boundaries to keep stakeholders apart that triggered unintended interpretations, saying “I have X million dollars in my house,...that makes you personally vulnerable, because then people assume you are very wealthy...but then also you get bureaucrats, corrupt officials that are opportunist. And then you could have anything happen.” In this case, a public announcement of a successfully completed investment round caused immediate audits by the Kenyan Revenue Authority and other government bodies that mainly base their evaluation on assets and revenue, in line with the “local” template prescriptions. Hence “[the auditors] think these people have a huge pot of money, [and] they need to be paying their taxes” (Kenyan investor, I7), so “the cost of compliance is very, very high, very high!” (expatriate entrepreneur, E18).

Solutions developed through cultural brokerage can thus amount to creative bricolage and can expand resource access, but they often prove to be ephemeral and difficult to replicate, because they depend on individual and situational characteristics. The developed solutions work because they are a “customized deal” that suits the expectations of particular actors with the corollary that solutions lack generalizability beyond the individual case, a pre-condition for the institutionalization of new sector routines (Sewell, 1992). The unintended outcome of this strategy of action is a significantly increased demand for ongoing efforts by a cultural broker, and a certain fragility caused by the idiosyncratic nature of the solution.

### 2.7.3. Active Modification Strategies

#### 2.7.3.1. *Promoting dominance of favored template*

An alternative to using the action options afforded by the two templates solely to solve entrepreneurial tasks is to actively promote change at the level of the templates at the same time. Active modification strategies of action thus combine elements of commercial and institutional entrepreneurship. One approach is to not only fully conform with one of the templates, but also to intentionally promote it to others. This approach includes active attempts to influence participants, from publicly theorizing and broadcasting one's convictions to efforts directed at changing organizational members' and business collaborators' values, norms and beliefs in a more personal way.

We found this strategy of action to be particularly prominent among followers of the global template and found far fewer incidents of promoting the local template<sup>9</sup>, mainly in the more defensive form of doubting that the global template can work in Kenya. Promoters of the global technology entrepreneurship template often use comparisons with successful global enterprises to expose the lack of suitability of the allegedly conservative local template and see a higher purpose in their own actions as enthusiastic role models. Statements such as “[Kenyan] don't hear the start-up American dream as much as my American colleagues” (expatriate entrepreneur, E12) or “My investment in this [Kenyan] business is in the hope that we're going to get a billion dollar business in the stock market within the next ten years” (repatriate corporate

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<sup>9</sup> We do not suggest that this strategy of action does not exist at all among followers of the local template. It is certainly visible outside the ICT sector and in the academic realm where participants seek to sensitize the public to the forces that have shaped “Africa” into what it is today and the actions necessary for a Pan-African future (see prominent works by African philosophers Mudimbe 1988; Mazrui 1993; Thiong'o 2016; Mbembe 2002). In the ICT sector, which is positively attuned to global economic exchange, it is less widely represented, and one may suspect that it surfaces more in “hidden” conversations.

representative, X6) illustrate this sentiment. Local practices are often theorized, rejected and assigned negative meanings such as nontransparent, nepotistic and unreliable, to be replaced with accountable, fair and trustworthy. Personal success is cast as compelling evidence of the template's power: "We [Kenyan entrepreneur and his venture] are going to be a story that people can say that this guy, we can see that he has been focused. He has been an honest guy. He has been a fair guy; never stolen, doesn't bribe and became successful. Maybe that is a nice formula. That is a formula to follow!" (Kenyan entrepreneur, E22).

The intended consequence of this strategy of action is to change the mixed nature of the sector, with the added benefit of enhanced personal reputation and status that comes alongside the role of a pioneer and standard setter. Yet despite the remarkable efforts by some to actively promote a template, only few participants pursue this strategy of action. Two unintended consequences that are visible to many in the sector may account for this. One is the diversion of attention, efforts and resources from essential entrepreneurial tasks toward institutional projects. The other is the risk of becoming entangled in political conflict, which may undermine the ability to pursue business goals. Ideological opposition and a backlash against globalization are prominent, exemplified by disparaging statements like "The kind of things that they [international investors] expect from that investment is that almost that guy [entrepreneur] needs to be Harvard trained and needs to have that kind of accounting system and all the kind of systems that they would have in Washington or in New York. Those systems tend to be useless in our market. Because our market is very...relationship driven!" (repatriate corporate representative, X6). Trying to demonstrate the superiority of one template creates resistance among the diverse set of participants, even among those who may more pragmatically enact most of the template's elements.

### 2.7.3.2. *Seeking synthesis and emancipation*

The alternative active modification strategy of action is synthesis. The premise of this strategy is that neither templates' prescriptions are ideal or even sufficient and that what is needed is a new template that is more than a situational combination of the existing templates' action toolkits. Proponents of this approach present a narrative in which micro-level efforts to hybridize and transpose elements become institutionalized and amount to a distinct Kenyan technology entrepreneurship template (Powell & Sandholtz, 2012; Sewell, 1992). This strategy of action connects technology entrepreneurship to a national and continental identity project aimed at breaking Kenya free from institutional configurations such as Western hegemony, the durable imprint of colonial rule and persisting neo-colonial influences, but also from historical domestic institutions that are seen as outdated. Technology entrepreneurship in this strategy of action is embedded in a narrative that aspires to put Africa on "an equal economic footing with the rest of the world" (Elumelu, 2011) and develops concepts that "re-imagine entrepreneurship" (Amaeshi & Idemudia, 2015: 215), in which the well-being of community, group solidarity and relationship building become deeply entrenched values to re-moralize capitalism in Africa (Amaeshi & Idemudia, 2015). This narrative draws directly from the Africapitalism concept, coined by a Nigerian philanthropist to activate African epistemological concepts, such as *ubuntu* and blend them with Western philosophies of capitalism.

The motivation for entrepreneurial action is grounded in autonomy and self-ownership (Rindova et al., 2009), because "If we are waiting for money from outside to come in, who is going to make the profit? Who is going to be the ones that eventually benefit? It is not us. We're just going to be watching. We do all the hard work and then it is unlocked by external money, and then we'll never move to that next stage!" (repatriate corporate representative, X6).

Proponents' actions are propelled by the expected superiority of an envisioned template with

“reformed local” action options<sup>10</sup> such that proponents state, for example, that “I feel very strongly that we cannot lose that opportunity for Africa. I am happy to lose money fighting and trying to make sure that our regulators and everybody out there knows that there are opportunities, also in Africa! Why should Africa probably be the last place where [technology X] would come?” (repatriate corporate representative, X6).

The intended consequence of this strategy of action is to simultaneously advance business and institutional change goals through innovating something truly novel. This strategy in the best case combines the status benefits as in other active modification strategies with the problem-solving capacity of a cultural broker. Yet even though this approach may open up unprecedented action options, it also generates new and unintended complications that require renewed action. Depending on the degree and quality of innovation, the venture itself can become politicized in service of a yet-to-be-developed and unproven template. In addition, any new institutional solution competes with the two existing local and global options, making it more difficult to establish its superiority.

#### **2.7.4. Limitations in Resolving Tension and Resulting Dynamics**

As discussed above, each strategy of action produces unintended consequences because it falls short of permanently settling tensions between the two templates. Why are tensions not resolved through entrepreneurial action? Our analysis suggests that the templates are comprehensive and holistic. Each template consists of interrelated elements. The five components we examined — individual characteristics, entrepreneurial process, relationship management, evaluation models

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<sup>10</sup> We observed a unique synthesis of key components of Kenya’s chamas and SACCOs with international finance institutions (i.e., VC and private equity) into an unprecedented organizational design geared toward creating a reformed local alternative with the rationale that “Once the locals also invest in the growth of the economy, then there is a larger chance that it can really scale up quickly” (Kenyan investor, I7).

and institutional assumptions — form a coherent meaning structure that complicates the selective enactment of individual elements. For example, an organic growth mind-set and hedging behavior, as prescribed by the component ‘hustling entrepreneurship ethos’ are incompatible with components in the ‘global’ template. From the perspective of a speculative evaluation approach, organic growth and hedging are out of context and irrational. They are perceived as a false prescription for the pursuit of economic leadership. Hence, strategies of action result in merely temporary solutions that are incomplete and demand further actions.

In sum, we found that industry participants construct six strategies of action to reconcile tensions but that each of these creates unintended consequences, because of the comprehensive and holistic nature of template structures, that industry participants then seek to address through renewed action. Thus, the unintended consequences of initial actions generate new tasks and situations, and so create the need for renewed action. These steps form an ongoing and open-ended globalization process (see Figure 1).

## **2.8. Discussion and Conclusion**

The movement of templates for economic action across international boundaries gives rise to complex cultural dynamics in local settings. Our study sought to contribute to the micro-phenomenological understanding of globalization, which adopts the perspective of the local and seeks to understand the generative dynamics of indirect effects of globalization. In the Kenyan ICT sector, participants constructed a local Kenyan entrepreneurship template and a global technology entrepreneurship template in opposition to each other. The templates’ incompatibility gave rise to six distinct strategies of action to resolve tensions between action guidelines. The comprehensive and holistic nature of the templates, however, meant that no strategy was without flaws, and each produced unintended as well as desired outcomes. Unintended consequences



hinder a permanent resolution of tensions and generate subsequent demands that require renewed action from industry participants. Together, these elements form a dynamic process model that brings into focus generative and open-ended dimensions of globalization in action.

### **2.8.1. Boundary conditions and generalizations**

We need to be cautious about generalizations from a study in a single setting. What type of more a general case does the Kenyan ICT sector represent? By studying a nascent sector, we focused on a relatively unsettled cultural environment, in which ambiguity was high and the range of action options was in flux. The strategies of action and consequences we observed can therefore be expected to generalize to other similar settings, such as transition economies (Peng, 2003; Stark, 1996) or emergent fields at the interstices of institutions (Furnari, 2014; Smith, Gonin, & Besharov, 2013). We did not examine the evolution of strategies of action, which leaves unanswered the question of whether the process we depict will remain unchanged. As the sector matures and performance differences become more apparent, one may expect a narrowing of action strategies, akin to those of proto-institutions (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips, 2002). In the event of greater institutional settlement, such as has been described in the literature on institutional complexity and pluralism (Dunn & Jones, 2010; Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011; Kraatz & Block, 2008) templates may turn into stable field-level logics that are deeply embedded in practices and power structures and may thus become more constraining. In such settled contexts, responses to external demands may resemble Oliver's (1991) institutional strategies from compliance to acceptance more than the toolkit-based emergent action patterns we observed. Further, the relative skill required of actors to draw on broad or narrow repertoires in their pursuit of entrepreneurial success was not the main focus of this study. Actors' cultural competence, the extent to which different strategies of action can be

combined, and the performance implications of such selections and configurations are important subjects for future study. Differences in success at the individual level are likely to influence the evolution of action strategies through selection and learning processes (Aldrich & Martinez, 2001; Aldrich & Ruef, 2006; Tushman & Anderson, 1986). To study these dynamics and assess the generalizability of our findings to more settled environments, a longitudinal research design would be necessary. Lastly, although we emphasized local processes and variation, one might ask how much the views and behaviors of local actors are already or increasingly dominated by global cultural power, as suggested, for example by theories of hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). Our data cannot address this possibility well. Movements to counter general global cultural influence do exist in Kenya (e.g., in African philosophy through Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Mwalimu Ali Mazrui or through globalization critics such as James Shikwati or Dambisa Moyo). In line with the open-endedness of our process model, we suspect that the outcome of this struggle will be contingent on how various actors mobilize in response to the new situations created by the initial step we studied.

### **2.8.2. Theoretical implications and contributions**

The appropriation and construction of global ideas by local actors offers a complementary perspective to realist globalization studies that construe global forces as objective, unidirectional and mechanical. Our study thus moves the representation and construction of global ideas in a specific locale into the limelight. Consequently, globalization can be understood as a “pull” process, emanating in the receiving locale, and what is perceived as global can be understood as locally constructed. One may then expect variation across locales that are exposed to the same universal themes because of the varied constructions of globality in reference to local realities. For example, the content of the global template of technology entrepreneurship is likely to look

different in other countries. A global template in a country like Germany would likely emphasize the legitimacy of failure, the importance of rapid prototyping, the role of risk versus bank capital and the necessity of an enabling regulatory environment and would de-emphasize the economic leadership contrast. A micro-phenomenological study of globalization thus allows us to understand the local representation of global ideas, which is important for studying their role in changing local economies.

Second, by grounding actions in pragmatic problem-solving concerns rather than in contested ideologies, we expose a more subtle globalization processes in which international flows introduce both a new context for action — in this study, technology entrepreneurship — and a new content for action, epitomized by the templates. Existing research has largely focused on the latter. New contexts for action expose participants to new task environments, roles and scripts, which precede options for how to perform and evaluate them. How globalization works indirectly, through the creation of new situations, demands and opportunities that structure activity but leave interpretive flexibility as to how to use the action options, is ill understood. Third, the co-existence of alternative action options in our model accounts for heterogeneous responses within the locale and opens up the possibility of outcomes such as hybridization, reform, entirely novel constellations and backlashes against foreign influence. What role initial conditions play in these indirect effects of globalization is worth further study. As a consequence of the previous implications, our study suggests a departure from conceptualizing globalization as a transmission process with a procedural endpoint. Instead, it supports an understanding of globalization as an open-ended process, which brings unintended consequences and indirect effects, through the creation of new social realities, to the fore. We have used the idea of generativity to capture this dynamic.

### **2.8.3. Implications for practice**

This paper also has implications for managerial and policy practice. For one, it urges greater attention to unintended and indirect effects in evaluating the transposition of managerial methodologies and policy interventions. Development programs, for example, are often evaluated fairly narrowly through randomized trial designs that try to isolate the immediate effect of interventions — i.e., whether or not they reach their intended goals. Yet such interventions may have indirect effects that arise from new action opportunities or the initial responses to the intervention in different spheres (Watkins, Swidler, & Hannan, 2012). This idea was further illustrated in Tavory and Swidler's 2012 study of how the promotion of condom use for reducing HIV transmission was culturally coded by rural Malawians and generated new sexual understandings and practices that undermined the intended outcome, leading in particular situations to a more risky behavior. Similarly, Yenkey's study (2015) on capital market construction in Nairobi's stock market exchange went beyond adoption and identified generative effects prompted by a new context and content of action. In fact, comprehensive cultural brokering as a strategy of action (i.e., reframing meaning systems by creating a shared social identity with culturally “neutral” promotion activities) to overcome seemingly disparate cultural differences resulted in increased trading activity across ethnic lines. However, globalization effects can also run in the other direction and entrench profound differences — as a result of a backlash against globalization — that manifest in practice. In her ethnographic study of investment professionals in Vietnam, Hoang (2015) showed how the promotion of Western practices and standards led to creative responses and is the formation of a new national ideal that was constructed in opposition to Western symbols of power. The study is an illustrative example of intentional boundary creation and thus the exclusion of adherents to a particular action template from local resource pools.

These examples offer cautionary tales about the transposition of action templates to different settings. Although the global diffusion of such templates does generate changes in local practices, these changes cannot be reduced to simple adoption or efficacy of practices, or even to their customization or translation. As a logical extension, so-called global best practices, oftentimes identified as generalizable solution strategies across cultural boundaries, will be equally subject to local interpretations and unintended consequences (Hinds, Liu, & Lyon, 2011). Hence, multinational companies, investors and policy makers should expect unintended effects of importing and heavily promoting foreign templates and either build flexible, context-specific adjustments and learnings about evolving local settings into their efforts or try to anticipate them more thoroughly. Applied to this study's context, experimenting with the synthesis of seemingly incompatible action options can lead to profound learning experiences. For example, accelerator programs specifically designed for hustling entrepreneurs would increase the entanglement of both templates by offering individuals the opportunity to work through the pitfalls of hustling in a mutual learning experience. This process could be directed at increasing the entrepreneur's resilience and taking a more strategic portfolio approach to intensively promote one sector or venture in the entrepreneur's portfolio.<sup>11</sup>

#### **2.8.4. Conclusion**

Studies of globalization in organization theory and economic sociology often treat globality as a homogenous and independent sphere that interacts with idiosyncratic local settings. While this analytic approach does represent the reality and captures the power of transnational actors and institutional spheres (such as professional development communities and agencies) it has led to a

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<sup>11</sup> This idea emerged during a lively discussion with Alessandro Giudici; any mistakes are ours.

neglect of an opposite reality, namely that what counts as global is constructed locally, in relation to representations of local action templates and their implications for practice. This local perspective in globalization implies the existence of multiple globalities and of globalization as a nondeterministic generative process. We studied a sector associated with a narrative about “Africa” that imagines a prosperous future for the continent (The Economist, 2013a). This does not reduce the need for critical analyses. Whether longstanding international dependencies and resource exploitation will persist or whether the entrepreneuring (Rindova et al., 2009) in and for “Africa,” found in the ICT sector, will produce change and socioeconomic development remains to be seen.

### **3. Chasing the Next Dollar: How Portfolio Workpreneurs Survive and Thrive in Kenya’s Hustling Economy**

#### **3.1. Abstract**

Drastic socioeconomic changes over the past decades have profoundly affected the Global North, with the result that the institution of stable, full employment — upheld by the “organization man” — has entered a new era that is fundamentally changing work into a world of flexible work arrangements that oftentimes run in parallel which is best captured by the image of an assiduous multi-active individual. This paper argues that a fresh view on contemporary work dynamics through an inductive qualitative study outside of well-researched contexts can provide new conceptualizations of the multidimensional work realities today’s workers are exposed to. Using empirical data from Kenya’s technology entrepreneurship sector and an interpretative

methodological design, four interrelated work dimensions emerge: hustling, organizational work, relational work and personal finance activities. Taken together, these constitute a comprehensive interface from which the multi-active individual in Kenya engineers a comprehensive work portfolio to hedge risks in the pursuit of a steady income flow, social welfare and the possibility of exerting agency for changing the status quo in an otherwise volatile and unpredictable environment — transforming the multi-active individual into a portfolio workpreneur. The implications of this conception on the future of work, organizing and organizations are discussed.

### **3.2. Introduction**

It seems to be a rare occurrence, but when academic researchers strike the same chord it is all the more powerful. In analyses of structural labor market changes in the Global North over the past decades, the data and its interpretations point overwhelmingly in one direction. Namely, that the full-time, life-long employment model that constituted much of social life and hence much of our current understanding in theorizing organizing and organizations has been replaced by a new strikingly different era of ubiquitous, precarious employment and contingent work (Ashford, George, & Blatt, 2007; Cappelli & Keller, 2013; ILO, 2015; Kalleberg, 2009). In this era the ascent of the non-standard worker, who is engaged in freelancing, side gigs, self-employment, temporary or contract work ushers in a work reality that is constitutive of new work norms and ideals (Barley & Kunda, 2001). It holds the promise that by breaking free from the organizational leash a higher degree of autonomy, flexibility and self-actualization can be realized (Baab-Mugira, 2016), which, as it turned out, came alongside uncertain future income streams, uncontrollable work hours, multiple work commitments that run in parallel and a work life in which “you’re on your own” (Bernstein, 2006; Evans & Barley, 2004). In contrast to the organization man today’s multi-active individual is enmeshed in a complex web of engagements



in order to generate sufficient income and make do in a fragmented and increasingly unpredictable labor market (Beck, 2000; Rifkin, 1995). As these drastic structural changes continue to unfold, the impacts will not only be confined to a changing work ethos and new career patterns but will also govern how we view and engage with organizations and thus profoundly influence the functions and purposes society assigns to organizations (Barley & Kunda, 2001; ILO, 2015). This development requires further investigation.

In the sociology of work literature the chasm between the old and new worlds of work are put into stark relief and discussed with by-now institutionalized categorical dualities, such as good versus bad, standard versus non-standard, full-time versus contingent, typical versus atypical, stable versus precarious, permanent versus temporary, formal versus informal and old versus new forms of work (Ashford et al., 2007; Cappelli & Keller, 2013; ILO, 2002, 2015; Kalleberg, 2009; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000). These categories, however, do not bring clarity in understanding the current multidimensional work-life realities but rather impose epistemological barriers that blur the view of the realities of today's multi-active individual. Put differently, during a period in which life-long, stable employment has morphed from a social fact into a myth — a development that many harshly criticize and try to defy with all means available to them — not much has actually been changing for the large majority of the global workforce, where unstable employment relationships, a volatile labor market, high degrees of informality and multiple income-generating activities have always been the norm. In fact, nothing else ever existed (Beck, 2000). That is to say that by letting go of full, stable employment as the guiding principle in theorizing the nature of work against which other, new forms of work are constructed, new concepts can emerge that use other forms of work as a starting point to begin theorization (Bandelj, 2009).

This generative move forms the starting point for this research endeavor. This paper thus seeks to begin exploring the question how individuals survive and thrive in economies that are characterized by a high proportion of informal work and unstable formal labor markets where full-time, life-long employment has never been anything more than a myth. The academic motivation behind this paper is to zoom into the work realities in a context in which multi-active individuals are the norm and *en détail* map out the multidimensional activities workers are engaged in — the micro-foundations of work. The idea is thus to assemble a holistic lens on today's work reality — grounded first and foremost in qualitative empirical material — and develop new insights as well as raise questions on the nature of work and organizing that are of importance to socioeconomic progress in locations where the multi-active individual prevails.

Data were generated using an interpretive research design — a grounded theory study that applied ethnographic techniques (Charmaz, 2011; Clarke, 2005) — in Kenya's "hustling economy" (Njung'e, 2015; Thieme, 2013), where 83% of the working population works in the informal sector (KNBS, 2016: 70), one of the highest such figures in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNECA, 2015: 67). Interestingly, the data revealed that "chasing the next dollar" encompasses four distinct work dimensions — hustling, organizational work, relational work and personal finance activities — that tie into existing literature streams of sociology of work (Bandelj, 2009; Handy, 1994; Kalleberg, 2009), entrepreneurship (Carter & Ram, 2003; Rindova et al., 2009), relational sociology (Bandelj, 2012) and the sociology of finance (Carruthers & Kim, 2011). In detail, each dimension on its own yields new insights into how individuals weave income stability, future outcome predictability and inter-subjective trust into an otherwise volatile and unpredictable environment that some would categorize as hostile. The phenomenon is best captured by the neologism "portfolio workpreneur," which adds to the commonly used label "portfolio worker" (Handy 1994) the agentic element of change creation that is most salient in the

notions of entrepreneur and entrepreneuring (Rindova et al. 2009). The portfolio workpreneur thus actively engineers multiple activities and forms of work into a comprehensive work portfolio to hedge risks in the pursuit of a steady income flow, social welfare — that is, a self-administered safety net — and the possibility of exerting agency for changing the status quo. In consequence, the multidimensional activity portfolio reveals a complex interface (a micro-structure) that individuals need to manage skillfully, with profound implications for career trajectories, entrepreneurial activities, decision making rationales, human resource management and economic exchange — that is to say, for organizing and organizations in society, all of which will be discussed at length, below, after the methods and findings section.

### **3.3. Methods**

#### **3.3.1. Context**

Kenya makes for a particularly interesting field site. It is one of the largest economies in Africa, despite its negligible endowment of natural resources — a substantial contrast with other leading economies on the continent (Pilling, 2016). The informal sector not only accounts for the large majority of employment in Kenya (about 11.8 million jobs in 2014) but nominally adds more new jobs per year than the formal or so-called modern sector (totals 2.5 million jobs in 2015); from 2013 to 2014, some 696,000 new jobs were added by the informal sector compared with 107,000 jobs by the formal sector (KNBS, 2016: 70). In addition, 281,973 local companies were registered and active in 2013 together with 400 foreign entities (KNBS, 2015: 99). These numbers should be used with caution (see Jerven 2016 for details), which makes new theory development even more prone to adhere to a qualitative approach in trying to understand pertinent work dynamics (Arino, Lebaron, & Hulliken, 2016).

The current study focused on Kenya's nascent and flourishing information and communications technology (ICT) sector, also known as Silicon Savannah — one of Kenya's key strategic pillars in transforming the country into a middle-income economy by 2030 (ICT Authority, 2014) and among the most internationally renowned economic clusters in Africa (The Economist, 2012). Despite its inherent global orientation, which attracts foreign talent, repatriates and Kenyans from affluent and privileged backgrounds, the creation of this technology entrepreneurship ecosystem remains grounded in the particular historical, cultural and economic conditions of Kenya (see Ndemo & Weiss 2016 for additional information). Thus, staging the field research here had several advantages over alternative field sites. First, most of the sector's economic activity is geographically clustered along Ngong Road in Nairobi, which greatly eases accessibility to informants and lends itself particularly well to participatory observations. Second, work in ICT and entrepreneurship in general is considered a risky career choice over other professions, such as employment in consultancies or government. Hence, interviewees for this study not only demonstrated knowledge of the broader pool of available action options for constructing their careers, but also had the opportunity and access to them, yet deliberately "opted out" of legitimized career patterns in favor of these more risky options. Third, the contrast between the old and new forms of work is most salient in the ICT sector (Ashford et al., 2007; Cappelli & Keller, 2013), equally so in Kenya, allowing interviewees to recognize and consider in their work life and personal narratives the full spectrum of work opportunities that are available in the nation. Taken together, the study's empirical setting is well-suited to exploring the various forms of work and the full portfolio of work opportunities in Kenya.

### 3.3.2. Data collection

The initial interest and motivation for fieldwork in Kenya were to take a look “behind the scenes” of technology entrepreneurship in the country and to investigate how technology entrepreneurship was performed in practice. During three months in 2014, a grounded theory study with semi-structured interviews and participant observations proved particularly suitable for exploring the work and social life of industry participants (Charmaz, 2011; Clarke, 2005). Besides a focus on technology entrepreneurship, the field study took a natural turn during data collection toward more diligently investigating work-related phenomena. The fieldwork was designed to understand the life of the participants holistically, and the exploratory nature of the study probed into a diverse set of themes (e.g., personal biography, future aspirations and action options, career, personal convictions, work experience, family background, role models, investor relations, organizational landscape in Kenya, rural versus urban issues, customs and traditions) with a variety of techniques (e.g., [informal] discussions, recurrent interviews, triangulation, on-site impromptu interviews, observations and formal and informal event participation) in order to uncover and understand compelling phenomena.

Thirty-three interviews formed the core empirical material for open and inductive coding<sup>12</sup>. The interviews (see Appendix III for an overview) provided deep, rich insights into the world of work in Kenya. At first sight, the interviewees would intuitively be grouped into the taken-for-granted roles and work profiles of the (technology) entrepreneur, investment fund manager, angel investor, consultant or CXO. However, to judge from their daily activities, almost none of the thirty-three interviewees in the study fit into only one of these categories but were

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<sup>12</sup> In total 134 interviews have been collected during the fieldwork phase, however, due to the exploratory nature of a grounded theory study a broad variety of topics were covered. Thirty-three interviews focused directly on issues of work and provided particular salient data and were thus selected for further analysis and coding.

rather spread across several or all of them and sometimes many more. A phenomenon that required further investigation.

Secondary sources that further supplemented the material came from newspaper articles, blog posts and their comment sections as well as tweets (Beneito-Montagut, 2011). Participatory observations at various sites, such as informal events, pitch nights, conferences and open office spaces, also provided important insights into the work and social life of the participants and further informed the coding. My prior work experience in rural and urban areas of Kenya, for a period of one and a half years (between 2008 and 2010) in the development aid industry also indirectly informed the data collection, because “hustling” in particular was equally prominent among both aid workers and so-called beneficiaries (Farrell, 2015). To be sure, the present study chose a particular point in time for its analysis and thus does not claim or intend to delineate the profound and complex historical, cultural and economic processes that gave rise to the observed social structure and behavior.

### **3.3.3. Coding and Analysis**

In the interpretation of the data, the Gioia method provided a guiding analytical framework that is reflected in the visualization and structuration of the data (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). The study aggregated the work activity profiles of the interviewees and secondary data sources into a single case setting (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). MAXQDA 12 software was used to start an open, iterative coding process that at first gave rise to largely descriptive codes in order to stay close to the actual data. Axial coding made it possible to cluster similar codes, make sense of the codes by relating and comparing them with each other and go back to the interview data and refine codes for greater accuracy as higher-order categories started to emerge (Charmaz, 2011). Moving back and forth between empirical material and existing literature proved instrumental in

identifying the various literature streams to which the data was speaking, in refining the key ideas that the data reflected, in framing the higher-order categories so that they linked data and existing literature comprehensively and thus four unique aggregate dimensions emerged — namely hustling, organizational work, relational work and personal finance activities. During this phase of the coding process, the framing of dimensions was inspired by Biggart and Delbridge's argument (2004) that multiple systems of exchange can co-exist within a society and can be accessed equally by constituents. In consequence, elements of the price, associative, moral and communal systems greatly helped to differentiate, comprehend and categorize actors' economic actions and work relations, which subsequently created distinct work dimensions that each depicted with their second-order codes the principle orientation in decision making, the embeddedness in microsystems of exchange and the rationale in exploring and exploiting (work) opportunities. The content of the first-order codes that filled each dimension with life connects to, and thereby integrates with, a variety of further literature streams bridging entrepreneurship, relational sociology, the sociology of organizations, finance and sociology of work; these will be elaborated upon in more detail in the findings and discussion section. In this interpretive research design, empirical illustrations, vignettes, markers, first-order codes, second-order categories and the aggregate dimensions are shown in detail in Appendices IV A–D. The findings section was crafted to provide a brief overview and integrates all data sources into a single narrative.

### **3.4. Findings**

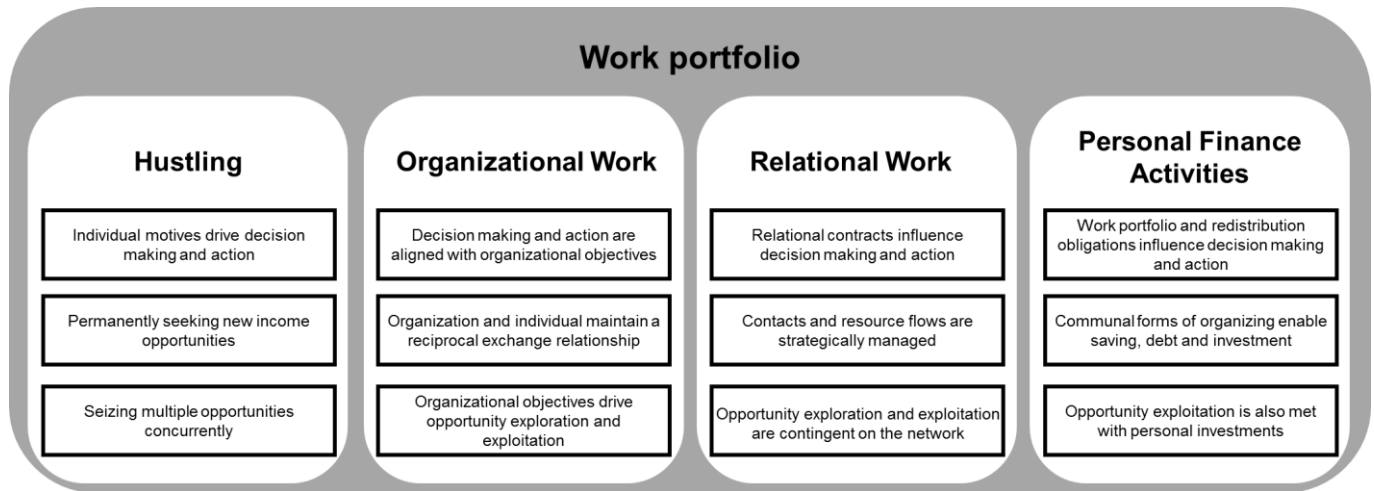
How do individuals survive and thrive in Kenya's hustling economy? Figure 3 depicts a four-dimensional work portfolio that lays out the various means and underlying systems of exchange individuals can access to “hedge their bets” in order to actively weave income stability into a volatile and unpredictable economy, to accumulate wealth and to entrepreneur individual and

collective change. Similar to a dashboard, the work portfolio offers the individual actor various action options and alternatives to generate and maximize income, create social welfare and exert agency.

The hustling dimension, in short, refers to a pragmatic form of work in which individual capabilities are deployed exclusively to foster self-interests. In this dimension, entrepreneurship, employment or contingent work are simply instrumental means that are enacted in parallel in order to make personal ends meet — that is, to ensure economic survival and maximize income. The organizational work dimension, by contrast, requires an ideological separation between individual motives and organizational objectives. It reflects a distinct form of work because it embeds the individual in an intraorganizational system of reciprocity in which income generation and personal achievements are dependent on the growth (e.g., organizational capability development) and success of a second party — the organization. In practice, the actions of the organization woman or man is primarily geared toward the achievement of organizational goals, which will in turn, so the belief, also benefit the individual. The relational work dimension refers to activities that are essential to construing, maintaining and protecting a robust and extensive social network — a personalized safety net — and to reach a social standing as well as develop a skill set that enhances resource access (i.e., to functional competencies, information and financial or human capital) and facilitates exposure to new opportunities. The personal finance activities dimension refers to the strategic redistribution of finances to meet (extended) family obligations, subsidize unsustainable work engagements, contribute to the creation of communal goods, save and invest via communal organizational forms and, depending on income level, devise and put into action an individualized investment philosophy. The goal of this dimension is to actively “put money to work.”



**Figure 3: Multidimensional Work Portfolio**



What emerges from this depiction is a diverse and broad range of activity possibilities, a multidimensional work portfolio that today’s multi-active individual purposefully manages in order to meet and overcome existential threats. It prompts the conception of the portfolio workpreneur — an individual whose activities are optimally spread out across multiple work dimensions, creating and managing a robust and adaptive work portfolio of simultaneous or overlapping activities that, in its entirety, help guarantee economic survival and accumulate wealth for the benefit of both the actor and the actor’s close social ties. Each dimension will be delineated in more detail below.

### **3.4.1. Hustling**

According to the interviewees, hustling in Kenya refers to the concurrent exploration and exploitation of income and business opportunities, which, as a result, enmesh the individual “hustler” in a web of parallel work engagements, obligations and expectations. The verb “to

hustle” or in the form of the Sheng<sup>13</sup> appropriation *kuhustle* takes on a ubiquity and taken-for-grantedness in social life that it suggests a proven and indeed successful survival strategy; it has even led some to coin the term “hustling economy” (Njung’e, 2015; Thieme, 2013). Hustling in this meaning structure thus resembles other, quite similar micro- and macro-concepts and shares elements with (a) polychronicity, the preference for being engaged in two or more tasks simultaneously (Bluedorn, 2002); (b) portfolio work, the purposeful exchange of full-time employment for a variety of flexibly integrated work arrangements (Handy, 1994); (c) patchworking, the mobilization and bundling of scarce resources from a diverse set of social and economic domains (Carter & Ram, 2003); (d) pluriactivity, the shift away from pure farming as the primary source of income to the prevalence of a mix of income generating activities (Fuller, 1990); and (e) portfolio or concurrent entrepreneurship, the ownership and engagement in multiple business ventures simultaneously (Ucbasaran et al., 2009).

What, however, is the rationale behind this particular action pattern? Best embodied in the idioms “hedge your bets” and “don’t put all your eggs in one basket” the ideal typical hustler seeks to generate a robust and steady cash flow and, if need be, balance out short-term income gaps through the diversification of activities across a number of deals and work commitments in multiple domains. Each new opportunity then becomes an additional building block toward a well-hedged income portfolio geared at absorbing unanticipated environmental shocks and positioned to accumulate wealth. In the following section, the second-order categories will be outlined to further enrich these insights (see also Appendix IV-A for empirical illustrations and quotes).

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<sup>13</sup> Sheng is a distinct language spoken mostly in Nairobi — “a slang based primarily on Swahili-English code switching.” (Mazrui, 1995: 171)

#### 3.4.1.1. *Individual motives drive decision making and action*

High uncertainty, an unstable labor market, an expansive informal sector, a notion of environmental arbitrariness and unpredictability embodied by a “you never know” mentality (K21) coupled with the absence of a robust and formal social welfare system demand deliberate action to help ensure economic survival. In fact, subjective experiences of existential fear become the key driver in decision making and legitimate subsequent action, so that self-interests are at the center of attention and generating sufficient income graduates to being the primary concern. Put more bluntly, “In town, you can really feel that hustling spirit, man. You can really feel that if they don’t make money at the end of the month, they are dead; that type of feeling” (K20). Not only is hustling under these environmental conditions a rationalized behavior, it is also expected and encouraged in interactions with close social ties (Thieme, 2013), making it an essential part of social life and thus an integral part of what an interviewee called “your DNA” (K1). A constant flow of new income and business opportunities fuels hustling and makes any other behavior, such as, focusing solely on one income-generating activity counterintuitive. An additional critical factor in decision making is the precariousness of the income situation that determines an individual’s risk threshold and tolerance for whether engagements and commitments seem sufficiently legitimate and suitable for income generation. It is here where interviewees’ descriptions of a dire need for “quick cash” favors borderline legal activities. An additional rule of the game is that economic exchanges — be they legal or not — tend naturally to stay “between me and you” (K20) in order to protect personal assets by favoring informal, personal and trust-based exchanges; otherwise interviewees fear that “attention [may come] from the wrong places” (K20), such as government actors, individual opportunists or criminals.

Taken together, individual motives and interests are geared toward ensuring economic survival, protecting income-generating activities and meeting intersubjective expectations that

combined make hustling a socially accepted behavior. How is the drive for economic survival put into practice?

#### *3.4.1.2. Permanently seeking new income opportunities*

In practice, different forms of work, such as employment, contingent work and entrepreneurship offer a broad range of action options and are pragmatic means to generate income. The pragmatism inherent in hustling is best illustrated by an anecdotal wordplay “compepreneur” — a fusion of competition and entrepreneur — that unveiled individual so-called entrepreneurs who used pitching competitions, grants and prize money as legitimate sources of income rather than as means for organizational growth (Kieti, 2014). In a similar vein, organization creation — often interpreted and classified as an entrepreneurial act — needs to be put to a test, because it can also be instrumentalized and prompted by the urge to maximize income gains and create a personalized “welfare system” (K16). The picture that emerges from the data is that once this happens individual motives and organizational objectives are essentially one and the same and ostensible entrepreneurial acts come to resemble “another side-hustle that can bring (me) a little bit of income” (E7). Being constantly on the hustle thus spurs a sense of openness and an active scouting for new income opportunities in the multi-active individual and demands the instant exploration and exploitation of opportunities. Many opportunities come in the form of “quick fixes” — short-term engagements or deals with immediate payoffs — to resolve fragments of recurring market inefficiencies (Thieme, 2013). It can also happen, and it frequently does (reflecting the accounts of multiple interviewees), that an employee, for example, seizes multiple engagements in parallel and is therefore in conventional terms an entrepreneur, employee and contingent worker at the same time.

#### 3.4.1.3. *Seizing multiple opportunities concurrently*

Multi-active individuals grow their activity profile organically over time as they seize new income opportunities and favor a setting in which two or more commitments ideally run in parallel. Interestingly, the data shows that these eclectic activities are not confined to only one economic arena or industry sector; work diversification also entails seizing opportunities across a variety of often unrelated industry sectors. Note that entering new industry domains remains primarily a personal endeavor for Kenyan workers, driven by individual motives and facilitated by social networks (see the relational work dimension section below). This phenomenon provoked a consultant's frustration with a client's business approach, because it did not follow the consultant's assumed business growth strategy but rather followed other principles, such that "They have a company that has three portions, right? — real estate, agriculture and education. It sounds like a conglomerate, but it really isn't" (E5). Farming-on-the-side, for example, is a prominent and widespread phenomenon that came up various times in the interviews (K1, K2, K5, K6, K16, K2 and K25) and resonates with academic work on pluriactivity that seeks to explain why individuals in rural and by now also urban areas in Europe are engaged in multiple activities and that it often seems to be their preferred choice (Fuller, 1990).

Consequently, the impetus to defy economic insolvency gives rise to a well-diversified and organically grown portfolio of engagements that is also a proven recipe for wealth accumulation and partial insulation from environmental pressures. Thus, fashioning and sustaining multiple hustles at the same time across multiple sectors is not only a temporary action pattern in Kenya intended to help fend off immediate existential threats, but also quite naturally translates into a long-term line of action for reaching a higher income status. After all, the ever present eventuality that "you might lose two of those things" (K22) or "be fired at any

time” (K6) requires constant ex-ante preparedness, regardless of how likely personal insolvency might actually seem to an external observer.

### **3.4.2. Organizational work**

A strikingly different work dimension arose from the data that demonstrated the differentiation and separation of individual motives and self-interests from organizational objectives (Kieser, 1989) and thus allowed “purposively constructed social organization” (Coleman, 1993: 2) to flourish. In this work dimension, the individual ceases to exist solely as an atomic actor in the market or network but rather enters a different social and economic exchange arena and thus assumes the role of an organization woman or man (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006). Here the individual action pattern is embedded in intra-organizational processes and fulfills tasks for the benefit of the organization. In short, the individual carries out what came to be understood as organizational work. As a result, organizational survival, growth and success become ends in themselves that co-exist alongside individual goals and self-interests, which has profound implications for the individual (see Appendix IV-B).

#### *3.4.2.1. Decision making and action are aligned with organizational objectives*

Developing and growing an organizational entity requires a unique, persistent commitment and agreement about the details of the exchange relationship. Spreading one’s attention across multiple activities and domains, as was natural for the ideal typical hustler, is now counterproductive and discouraged, because “you are moving inherently at fifty percent of your pace” (E4). Thus, “someone then that’s moving at a hundred percent pace with pure focus is going to outdo you” (E4). All individual activities are therefore streamlined primarily to further

the organization's objectives. Thus, in order to ensure that the agreement is not violated, interviewees highlighted intra- and inter-organizational accountability principles that create a sense of transparency, trust and enforceability or, in the words of an informant, "that little voice of sanity" (K17) to safeguard organizational interests — through, for example, external equity investments that permit external financiers to have a voice in organizational decision making. The individual (in particular the entrepreneur) thus deliberately decouples from the organization and demarcates and enforces a boundary within and outside it, so that relational overembeddedness and personal liabilities (i.e., outstanding favors, preferential treatment for close ties and intersubjective expectations) do not spill over and interfere with organizational processes or conflict with organizational goals. Rather, the boundary promotes a division between private and work life, creates separate identities and assigns legitimate roles and tasks that are believed to be necessary for what an interviewee called "cleaner dealings" (K7) in order to nourish the rise of fictitious actors (Coleman, 1993).

#### 3.4.2.2. *Organization and individual maintain a reciprocal relationship*

What became clear is that the contractual agreement between an organizational actor and an individual is based on the idea that organization's successes and rewards become transferred to the individual members through, for example, equity-based compensations (E4 and E7) as well as distinct forms of personal development that are only possible within organizations (K7). A perceived breach of the contract destabilizes the exchange relationship, with detrimental effects on members' loyalty and commitment. After all, organizational members, in particular (technology) entrepreneurs, sacrifice alternative activities for the good of the company by, as interviewees referred to it, stepping away from previously established safety nets and placing their trust in the organization and market mechanisms — an arrangement that is regarded by

those individuals that pursued this path as superior for economic and personal success (for a passionate argument against hustling and for research in higher education see Franceschi 2015; Ndemo 2016). Individual capabilities are thus used on behalf of the organization, requiring a substantial mindset shift away from survival-based decision making and toward incorporating and prioritizing organizational survival and growth. In particular, putting into practice the mantra “all those lessons (you) learned about being a great hustler, make that work for the [firm X]” (K22) requires a “leap of faith” (E4) that in fact organizational work and not hustling will realize a premium future payoff and also unlock new future imaginaries.

#### 3.4.2.3. *Organizational objectives drive opportunity exploration and exploitation*

For technology entrepreneurs in particular, creating new organizations allow them to articulate and act out bold visions and imaginaries with the potential to dramatically affect — or disrupt, as some call it — the life of many rather than only a proximate few. A purposively constructed organization then becomes the preferred vehicle “to build a billion-dollar business” (K17), because an individual alone or even a small collective cannot execute on such an objective. The search for fundamental market inefficiencies or market niches and corresponding innovative solutions goes hand in hand with such supra-individual objectives and captures the full attention of organizational members. Once a newly developed solution is successfully marketed — also known as finding the optimal “product–market fit” — it prompts further organizational growth. The fictitious actor thus specializes and produces a permanent solution for which it becomes known and valued in the society. Status and reputation, however, are not solely an extrapolation of the social capital of the organization’s members; instead, organizational actions are seen as being separate from those of its individual members, and thus an independent organizational



“account” exists that is carefully managed and protected. Overall, a strong belief in market mechanisms and organizational hierarchies bundles the actions of the multi-active individual toward organizational objectives, with the repercussion that individual self-interests need to be synchronized in order to be in tune with organizational interests.

### **3.4.3. Relational work**

The relational work dimension refers to the creation, maintenance, extension and protection of social relationships in Kenya’s hustling economy. It thereby introduces a distinct dimension of work that is not separate from other portfolio dimensions but rather fundamentally intertwined and interrelated. How so? Economic and social arenas do not unfold in exclusive ways but are rather mutually constitutive, meaning economic activity and economic transactions are also inherently social actions and interactions (Bandelj, 2012; Beamish & Biggart, 2006; Zelizer, 2012). This insight thus demands that we single out the unique activity patterns of the multi-active individual that are directed toward cultivating and managing social ties. Once attention is placed on these transactions, interactions and the networks that emerge, a statement such as “I believe in building the social first, the business will come later” (K16) epitomizes the centrality of social relations, not necessarily in the ordering of social and economic actions but rather in the myriad ways of constructing a social scaffolding, in the strength of social ties, in the various content that flows between social relations and in the variety of problems and issues an actor’s social network can solve (see Appendix IV-C).

#### *3.4.3.1. Relational contracts influence decision making and action*

Of central concern to individual actors is their social capital — the size and quality of their network and their own functional centrality and social standing within it. Social relations are

carefully cultivated and protected (e.g., covering up or compensating for subpar performance by coworkers), because they bear the potential to facilitate future resource access (e.g., capital, jobs and information) — which is particularly relevant when environmental uncertainty is high. The various accounts of interviewees on the struggle for economic survival created an image in which close social ties are a conceptual safety net that can materialize into tangible resource flows once activated, demarcate a playing field to access, distribute and seize new economic opportunities and, in turn, also form a web of reciprocity expectations and intersubjective obligations.

“Building the social first” (K16) thus enables and constrains action, thereby influencing activities in other portfolio dimensions (Uzzi, 1997). In particular, interpersonal trust and loyalty (rather than qualifications and expertise) advance to become key decision variables for interviewees in economic transactions, making the exploration and exploitation of opportunities with close social ties the preferred and “safer” option. However, close social ties in conjunction with an extensive network function not only as safeguards in the form of social insurance policies against shirking and other negative behaviors, but also fulfill another important function that often remains remarkably absent from academic investigations — that is, they guarantee safety and security in the event of potential personal harm and danger. As a result, the protective power of a social network in fending off potential harmful actions becomes relevant once individuals “put their head above the water” (E1) as an informant called it and, in consequence, limit the potential action options of those that do not possess such an emergency asset.

#### 3.4.3.2. *Contacts and resource flows are strategically managed*

Maintaining social relationships in order to find pride in saying “I have a great network” (K1) not only prompts action from interviewees geared toward increasing tie strength by reliably meeting social exchange expectations and creating regular face-to-face encounters, but also requires an

active avoidance of actions that could negatively affect tie strength. After all, the ramifications of tie dissolution on future action options are unpredictable. Similarly, the realization that “next-level projects need next-level sorts of networks” (K7) prompts activities such as participating in specific social events or attending particular schools and universities that promise to further the strategic expansion and upgrading of one’s personal network. An ever-increasing contact list, it is believed, thus increases exposure and access to new resources. At the same time, managing these social relations prompted interviewees to create resource boundaries (i.e., family vs. friends; parents vs. siblings) to control resource flows across the social network in order to carve out spaces of autonomy and establish a sense of social control while being embedded in a tightly woven network. Financial information, in particular, is never fully disclosed but is rather released in bits and pieces to various contacts.

#### 3.4.3.3. *Opportunity exploration and exploitation is contingent on the network*

Activating and using social relations to unlock and access new resources can enlarge the pool of action options and provide a sense of choice, privilege and independence from conventional means so that, despite being approached by private equity funds multiple times, one informant stated firmly, “I would never take their money. I can raise the money overnight. I can make ten phone calls and raise [X] dollars.... If I wanted to go in a particular way, I could do that” (K26). To be sure, the mobile phone and contact list fulfill a specific function in opportunity exploration and exploitation. They provide the assurance of being just “one phone call away” (K6) from instantly accessing important resources, making it imperative to have not just any kind of network but “a network where you can pick up the phone and make a call” (K1). In fact, it is not only the network size, quantity of ties or how responsive and reliable the network is that define

its value to the individual but also the functional competence and problem-solving capacity of each contact and of the network as a whole. This approach to mobilizing resources and activating a network's protective and economic power is spoken of in terms like these: "I don't actually know whether I'll ever need this guy, but at some point I'll be, like, 'Oh. Wait a minute. I have a guy on my phone.' And I call him up. 'Hey, I'm facing this particular problem. What do you think I should do?' And he tells you, 'Do this. Come see me.' And I go see the guy, and he fixes my problem. Unfortunately, it's the only way to do business in the country" (K6). In the relational work dimension, a mobile phone's contact list strikingly resembles a repository of solution approaches — a strategic asset, really — that can be used to tackle future problems as long as widely shared and taken-for-granted social exchange principles are followed. In addition, if it is the case that one's immediate social network cannot activate the needed resources directly, then extensions to second or third degrees can temporarily and reliably enlarge the network, because "Referrals and recommendations in this country mean a lot...It's because I wouldn't want to refer somebody to you that would wreck my main image to you" (K21), creating in effect an even larger resource pool for the multi-active individual.

#### **3.4.4. Personal finance activities**

Active investing, saving and communal contributions (such as financial donations) are often excluded from conventional conceptions of work. Yet for the multi-active individual in Kenya's hustling economy, personal finance activities — the deliberate management of financial resources — are not only frequently alluded to in the interviews but fundamentally intertwined for interviewees with the other dimensions and are an integral part of the work portfolio. Here's why: The plethora of informal and formal financial instruments — which encompass the country's pervasive mobile-money transfer system M-Pesa, saving co-operatives and credit

unions, banks, informal capital redistributions and individualized long-term investment strategies — offers a remarkable pool of distinct action options.

To be sure, research on economic development and financial inclusion, particularly in low-income contexts, has intensively portrayed how income gaps are balanced out, not only by purposefully engaging in multiple income-generating activities that in classical terms would be classified as work (i.e., employment, self-employment or daily labor), but by simultaneously using day-to-day and long-term financial management techniques (FSD Kenya, 2014). The infamous label of the “barefoot hedge-fund manager” coined by Banerjee and Duflo (2012) demonstrated the richness and diversity of the available approaches and the conflation of social and economic spheres as well as the multiple domains individuals can access to hedge risk and make do. Although these insights have emerged from the study of low-income citizens, the findings from the current study are in fact not substantially different except that the spectrum of potential personal finance activities is even broader and that transaction volumes are significantly higher (see Appendix IV-D).

#### *3.4.4.1. Work portfolio and redistribution obligations influence decision making and action*

The personal finance dimension engenders both opportunities and liabilities in the work portfolio of multi-active individuals. The opportunity to cross-subsidize activities across work dimensions or across different forms of work is indeed a common phenomenon. Take the hustling dimension, for example, in which contingent work, employment and even entrepreneurial work can morph into instrumental means for financing organizational work. As explained by an informant, “The reason why people [entrepreneurs] do side-hustles is because no one is investing in their start-up. For them to exist and continue building their dream, they need to survive at the same time. They

co-exist, right?” (K3). Remittances to family members are important payment obligations that also have to be considered during income generation. Interestingly, the redistribution of funds can take a mundane character in the form of periodic money transfers or it can also become a strategic investment opportunity in the activities of (extended) family members, such as financing education, temporarily enhancing purchasing power for significant investments, investing in organizational work or balancing out income gaps. A positive return on these investments comes in the form of reduced payment obligations. Similarly, redistribution expectations that linger in the social network have to be fulfilled, which ties directly into the relational work dimension. Yet another form of redistribution and social investment is the tradition of community self-help events known as *harambee*, which means “pull together.” Harambee “embodies ideas of mutual assistance, joint effort, mutual social responsibility, community self-reliance” (Mbithi & Rasmusson, 1977: 13) and effects social exchange. It is a powerful cultural tool used to mobilize communal resources — both monetary and in kind — in which the multi-active individual ought to participate for the benefit of the collective good. A facilitative device in complying with the demands and expectations of monetary redistributions is the mobile phone in conjunction with M-Pesa (for detailed information see Omwansa & Sullivan 2012; Mbiti & David Weil 2011) . The slogan “M-Pesa it” (K23) denotes a reliable, safe and instant financial transfer possibility to receivers that are enlisted in the multi-active individual’s contact list. M-Pesa is by now the dominant and preferred technology for financial transactions in Kenya and greatly facilitates personal finance activities (The Economist, 2013b).

#### 3.4.4.2. *Communal forms of organizing enable saving, debt and investment*

The *chama* (meaning club, association or group in Swahili) and the savings and credit co-operative (SACCO) are informal and formal communal organizational forms that are based on

principles of *Gemeinschaft*, with the agreement that “I’ll do my part to make sure everybody else rises up” (K16) (Biggart, 2001). The chama conjoins multi-active individuals who are primarily linked through a social bond (i.e., family members, colleagues, school alumni or friends) to a common economic end, such as periodic saving or investment (see Kenya Association of Investment Groups 2014). The multi-active individual, however, does not rely on just a single chama but instead diversifies and entertains chamas of various sizes, degrees of formalization and financial significance, so that it is the norm to be “in three chamas...with the family, with my girlfriends and with this more serious crew” (K25). In addition, SACCOs — an equivalent to credit unions and formalized investment clubs — offer further investment and debt options and are a key financial intermediary in both rural and urban areas. Kenyan SACCOs today have more than USD 5 billion under management, by far the largest figure for such organizations in African economies (World Council of Credit Unions, 2014). They are member owned, follow primarily commercial interests and tend to be organized around common economic interests (e.g., investment in particular industry sectors) and common social denominators (e.g., close social ties or common professions). The diversity of chamas and SACCOs, as well as their creative combination, offers a diverse — albeit risk-averse — portfolio of saving schemes, investment options and debt instruments that are crucial in providing financial security and stability and that exist in parallel with offerings from the formalized banking sector.

#### 3.4.4.3. *Opportunity exploitation is met with individual investments*

The pitfalls of investing through communal organizational forms as listed by informants — including lengthy bureaucratic processes, lack of risk appetite and majority rule — are frequently countered with personal investments, which are particularly relevant for high-net-worth multi-active individuals. Personal finance activities thus bear the potential and risk of attracting and

thus deviating attention from other activities. As an active entrepreneur, angle investor, consultant and mentor explained it, “I have a policy: I am a majority investor. I control fifty-one percent of every business. At least fifty-one. Most of the businesses I own, eighty-five, ninety percent, hundred percent in some cases. But I don’t like doing deals where I am not a control investor unless there is a really, really amazing strategic partner that comes on board” (K26). The amount of time spent evaluating and overseeing new investments opportunities as well as the recurrent nature of personal investments in the organizational work of others require an individualized investment thesis that often turns the multi-active individual also into an angle investor and mentor as well.

### **3.5. Discussion and Conclusion**

In this study, I sought not only to draw attention to the day-to-day activities that today’s multi-active individual is enmeshed in, but also to start structuring and organizing them which came to be a complex work portfolio. The hope is that a fresh if so far largely inductive view of how work in Kenya’s hustling economy takes place can be instrumental in going beyond existing conceptions of work, while remaining complementary to them and integrating other prominent literature streams, in order to help foster a more multidimensional conception of contemporary work — a conception that illuminates the microstructure of work that each individual worker is exposed to and is thus prompted to engineer a personalized work portfolio that can guarantee economic survival, enable the accumulation of wealth and allow for agency.

The underlying question for the discussion section is what insights can be distilled from this exploratory study in order to better mirror the nature of work and get a better handle on its future — globally, that is. To do so, we need to dissolve the instituted geographical boundaries in our minds and the assumptions that come with them between what are now called the Global



South and Global North (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2008; Tsui, 2007), because there is in fact no need to reverse-engineer the study's insights. Instead we can clear an altogether new pathway that embraces the unfolding structures in this "second modernity" (Beck, 2000: 17) — in which the collapse of the institution of full employment and the hollowing out of the welfare state have turned many of the dualities that dominated the field into epistemic obstacles rather than helpful tools for comprehending change in society (Ackroyd, 2009).

### **3.5.1. Implications**

In the following section, I interpret the study's findings further and offer corollaries that were provoked by the interplay between the empirical data and a broad reading of the academic literature as well as limitation of the data and avenues for future research.

#### *3.5.1.1. The portfolio workpreneur*

One of the central aspects emerging from the study is that the flexible arrangements of multiple work engagements, be they contingent work, employment or entrepreneurial work, that are currently the focus of most academic conversation cover in depth only certain elements of portfolio work — mostly in the hustling and organizational work dimension (Ashford et al., 2007; Evans & Barley, 2004; Handy, 1994; Kalleberg, 2009). The other dimensions — relational work and personal finance activities — tend to be treated as separate spheres of social and economic life and are rarely seen as interconnected (Bandelj, 2009; Zelizer, 2012). A fuller appreciation of all the dimensions, however, as seen in Kenya's ICT sector, reveals a broader activity spectrum across which multi-active individuals can purposefully manage their resources (i.e., time, emotions, finance, contacts and information). This broader account proposes an

important shift in thinking about the multi-active individual — a shift that is inherent in the “portfolio workpreneur” label developed here.

Although, on the one hand, the terms “portfolio work” and “portfolio worker” still seems suitable, an additional component becomes apparent and needs to be added, namely the agentic element of entrepreneurship most prominently present in the recently coined verb “entrepreneuring,” to mean — the deliberate creation of “new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments” (Rindova et al., 2009: 477). In an environment characterized by uncertainty, volatility and unpredictability, the multi-active individual actively engineers a portfolio of activities directed at providing income stability in times of volatility, accumulating wealth despite omnipresent resource scarcity and creating — to mean entrepreneuring — social welfare jointly with close social ties in light of absent state-run welfare systems. This pervasive phenomenon is more adequately reflected in the term “portfolio workpreneur.” The portfolio workpreneur thus find its ideal in optimally spreading resources across the work dimensions to craft a flexible, multidimensional work portfolio that is responsive and adaptive to changing environmental conditions. Admittedly, the actions of the portfolio workpreneur are not disruptive but rather make do with what is at hand and thus maintain institutional settings, yet under the given environmental circumstances diversifying activities across work dimensions can provide a notion of autonomy and environmental insulation from risk — a sense of security and safety that is often felt to be absent and is embodied in the idea of “entrepreneuring” (Rindova et al., 2009).

It is important to note that the insights presented in this study remain within the confines of a single case study and are thus merely exploratory in nature. Further, the exclusive focus in this study on technology entrepreneurship and the middle class, while not contradicting research in low-income contexts (A Banerjee & Duflo, 2012; Thieme, 2013), requires additional cross-sectional (e.g., industry sector and income group) and multi-country studies — be they

quantitative or qualitative — that will put the derived arguments to the test and provide further, more fine-grained insights into the underlying work ideals and career patterns of today's multi-active individuals (Barley & Kunda, 2001).

#### *3.5.1.2. Managing interdependencies and tensions in the work portfolio*

Allocating attention and resources for the various dimensions of work gives rise to new management issues for the portfolio workpreneur, because dedication to a particular activity in one dimension may turn out to be counterproductive for activities and goals in other dimensions or even detrimental rather than facilitative for income generation and wealth maximization. The portfolio workpreneur thus has to establish a flexible, adaptive balance of activities across all dimensions in order to create a balance of mutually supportive, beneficial work portfolio elements that in their entirety produce a superior outcome.

To illustrate the impulse to engineer a robust work portfolio in more detail, consider, for example, the tensions and tradeoffs between organizational work and the hustling and relational work dimensions. Irresolvable differences appear between the ideological and pragmatic undertones in these dimensions. The organizational work dimension considers organizational survival, growth and success to be ends in themselves that deserve one's full attention and require the full dedication of resources, while in the hustling dimension different forms of work are considered to be solely instrumental means toward income generation, thus encouraging concurrent work engagements. In consequence, investing resources into organizational survival (which indirectly helps guarantee economic survival, it is assumed) reduces the amount of effort that can be allocated directly to securing economic survival. In this study, only one individual committed the majority of resources to the organizational work dimension for one organization (K17) and neglected the hustling dimension (which is overall an extremely rare phenomenon).

Instead, striking a balance and gradually shifting resources from the hustling to the organizational work dimension seemed more common, which in turn sends mixed signals to external observers and investors on such issues as commitment to the business, reliability, transparency and “real” intentions. Similarly, social exchange expectations that reign in the relational work dimension create externalities that can adversely affect organizational work. The management of outstanding favors or the expectation of preferential treatment may help fulfill intersubjective expectations, but it solidifies the perceived purpose of business as a “welfare system” (K16) and causes organizational performance to decline.

The ultimate operative challenge for portfolio workpreneurs is thus to establish a personalized resource combination whose activities are mutually beneficial and responsive to changing environmental conditions. How individuals resolve these tensions and make use of the various work dimensions requires additional research. Further, the impact of situational characteristics and environmental changes on the behavior of portfolio workpreneurs would provide evidence on their responsiveness, adaptability and resilience to external shocks. In theory, a crisis in one industry sector (i.e., banking) would simply prompt the portfolio workpreneur to shift resources to another sector with a short-term impact on income generation. A longitudinal research design would be particularly helpful in picking up these resource allocation shifts as well as their consequences.

### *3.5.1.3. Entrepreneuring for whom?*

The activities of the portfolio workpreneur also inspire the questions of what social purpose portfolio work fulfills and whether it is socially desirable? These questions arise amidst fierce critiques of portfolio work, because once it is applied to a particular industry sector its implications can be stark, as illustrated, for example, by this statement: “The root cause of our

academic apathy is an unethical practice... a practice based on the fallacy that a person could hold two or three full-time jobs at once.... This person will not have time to prepare lectures, to innovate, to dedicate time to students and pupils. Neither will he or she have time to create a school of thought, to seek grants or to dedicate any time or energy to such a demanding activity as research” (Franceschi, 2015). It follows that the externalities of portfolio work require investigation and a nuanced understanding in order to tease out which practices, once socially ratified and endorsed, are particularly detrimental or beneficial to socioeconomic development. In fact, it brings the question to the fore whether a rationale or an observable shift in action patterns exists that would allow one to make inferences about the inflection points at which portfolio work begins to shift from the individual toward the benefit of the collective or vice versa.

Based on the current study’s data, a possible sequence or order would place the (extended) family and collective in the primary focus, meaning that the purpose of the portfolio workpreneur is first to ensure basic economic survival and prosperity, true to the mantra “We rise and fall together!” Once existential threats are fended off and a certain income level is achieved (i.e., “We have risen together!”), the premise of *Gemeinschaft* — as embodied in, for example, the *chama* — and its liabilities (i.e., social exchange expectations, cumbersome administrative processes and a conservative risk profile) seem to offset its benefits. At this juncture the portfolio workpreneur’s purpose, attention and action favor individual over collaborative outcomes. Yet another inflection point seems to exist when the purpose shifts to promoting a broader societal change agenda — disrupting and creating institutions (Lawrence et al., 2009) — as reflected in the following statement: “I am happy to lose money, fighting and trying to make sure that our regulators and everybody out there knows that there are opportunities also in Africa” (K18).

It seems, then, that at various times in their careers portfolio workpreneurs reorganize their portfolio to fulfill a series of different roles and functions in society. The fundamental

questions are what situational characteristics cause these purpose shifts in which the multi-active individual graduates from one role to embrace the next (e.g., maintainer to disruptor), and whether environmental conditions (i.e., work settings) can purposely be engineered in order to prevent situations analogous to the one Franceschi (2015) noted, in which “great academic scholars [turn] into academic grasshoppers who will never publish, but simply perish, in a jam.”

*3.5.1.4. The future of social organizing: Is organizational work becoming even more elitist?*

A central area of concern that unfolded in the empirical data was the organizational work dimension — the deliberate investment of one’s resources into organization creation, survival, growth and success. Once the institutional environment shifts to embrace a self-image of “You’re on your own” away from “We’re all in this together” (Bernstein, 2006; Kalleberg, 2009), organizational work becomes a reflection of (economic) privilege rather than the desired and taken-for-granted go-to option for the exploring and exploiting opportunities — that is, the optimization of collective value for the advancement of society (Donaldson & Walsh, 2015). Instead the multi-active individuals seems to be fully occupied managing an inherently complex work portfolio to make ends meet. To be sure, portfolio workpreneurs in Kenya constantly straddle the poles of individualization and togetherness in their activities, yet dedication to organizational work requires at some point an important ideological shift away from organizations as pure instrumental means to organizations as integral societal actor, making them ends in themselves.

Although so called “hustlers” in Kenya and their respective organizations deal with many day-to-day problems, market inefficiencies and minor tasks, sustainable and innovative solutions to more complex local and global problems remain a rare occurrence (Kuo, 2015), because the

opportunity costs of dedicated organizational work outstrip any illusion of a future payoff. Thus, when organizational work is a luxury — restricted to a privileged few — then economic and social inequality are inevitably on the rise. Despite the global entrepreneurial wave that is fueled by conventional and social entrepreneurship heroes alike, organizational work will remain reserved for only a few affluent citizens, thrusting a future scenario onto the stage that is deeply worrisome.

Do we need an overhaul of existing organizational designs or new organizational forms altogether? An answer could come from what Jerry Davis called “platform capitalism” — “nomenclature for the sharing economy, and particularly online (often mobile) systems that connect buyers and sellers (e.g., Uber, AirBnb, TaskRabbit)” (Davis, 2016: 24) — which gives rise to a completely new set of industries and organizational designs and thus enables atomistic individuals to plug in and out of multiple organizations as they deem fit. It feeds into the contemporary hustling narrative, which says that indeed “Your life is a DIY project” and that you need to further “#fuelyourhustle” (Whaley, 2016) — which will also inevitably affect the purposes and centrality that organizations have in and for society (Walsh, Meyer, & Schoonhoven, 2006). In contrast, a quite different idea is that organizing, organization creation and “creative destruction” can no longer be championed by an individual “hero” or team. Instead a collectivization of the entrepreneurial process has to be the answer capable of fundamentally changing the rules of the game. How? New organizations, such as startup studios and venture builders, have already started exploring this path and are morphing into resource brokers that ignite the ideation process with a diverse set of partners (Colaço & Umanah, 2016; Marrero, 2016). Instead of sequencing the involvement of partners, a collective approach that spreads the risk across many (e.g., angel and Series A investors, potential CXOs, industry experts and

consultants, each with an equity share in the new venture) may well prove to be a way forward in promoting innovation despite the rapid ascent of the multi-active individual.

### *3.5.1.5. Interdisciplinarity and the breakdown of dualities*

For the refinement of the portfolio workpreneur concept, interdisciplinarity is inevitable in order to mirror the prevalent work realities around the globe. The boundaries between entrepreneurship, work and organizing are inherently blurry, and thus an eclectic use of theoretical lenses to better grasp the changes in society is desirable. Personal finance activities, for example, have been notably absent from most academic conversations. The sociology of finance literature has largely focused on the financialization of the economy and its political dimensions (Carruthers & Kim, 2011). Similarly, the purposes and diverse set of finance practices gauged from the perspective of multi-active individuals promise to be an equally rich terrain for developing novel insights (see, for example, work by Preda [2001] and Yenkey et al. [2015] and the edited volume by Cull et al. [2012]).

Existing dualities, as argued here — such as the informal versus the formal sector, opportunity versus necessity entrepreneurship or stable versus precarious jobs that currently dominate the field — may well prove to be more of a hindrance than an eye-opener. For example, firms that have deliberately delayed formal registration and stayed within the confines of what is called the informal sector may actually, as it turns out, realize an advantage and subsequently experience higher growth and employment rates than their more conventional counterparts (Williams, Martinez-Perez, & Kedir, 2016). Similarly, the label “necessity entrepreneur” is only a partial reflection of the activity spectrum that multi-active self-employed individuals access and misses a broader dynamic at play. Further, terms that help to differentiate between good and bad work, standard and non-standard workers or stable and precarious employment are indicative of



the profound changes that social and economic spheres are experiencing yet are only partially suitable for understanding and theorizing trends in the nature of modern work, its ideals and its career patterns. Embracing the normalization of the boundaryless portfolio career might well prove to be a more generative pathway toward theory development and promote a more pluralistic, global scholarship agenda (Tsui, 2007).

#### *3.5.1.6. Practical implications*

Across a broad range of possible implications, I focus here on three: (intra)organizational work, entrepreneurship and policy development. Managing, incentivizing and aligning a work force of multi-active individuals toward a common goal seems a daunting task. Not only human resource managers but also line managers require a distinct toolkit to deal with the unique challenges facing portfolio workpreneurs and need ideally to work with rather than against employees so that the organization what an informant labeled as “the best hours of the day” (K22) from its employees. Similarly, the entrepreneurial eco-system with its support organizations and programs, needs to move away from the singularity dictum and cater to the needs of portfolio workpreneurs instead of socializing them into an outdated entrepreneurship model. In essence, this signifies a reconceptualization of existing entrepreneurship programs. Finally, an active and progressive engagement of policy makers and academics is needed both to critically assess current work trends (see, for example, Evans & Barley 2004) and to actively engage in forming new work ideals as the proclaimed freedoms and self-actualization that should have accompanied the DIY work arrangement do not in fact entirely deliver on their promise. The paucity of feasible emotionally and physical healthy work ideals also requires a more proactive engagement and collaboration between policy makers and academics to try to reinstitute with new policies a sense of stability, security and vision comparable with that of the era of the “organization man” that is

not contradictory to but supportive of the valued ideals of flexibility, freedom and independence that characterize today's portfolio workpreneur.

### **3.5.2. Final remarks**

By looking behind the scenes of technology entrepreneurship in Kenya, this study has developed an inductive understanding of the work portfolio that multi-active Kenyans make use of and that might well constitute an insightful depiction of the future of work in societies around the world that still struggle in letting go of the institutionalized security and predictability that came with the lifelong, full-time employment model and state-led welfare (Beck, 2000). Although the implications are manifold and suggest numerous avenues for future high-impact scholarship, a cultural power could lie in these structural changes and subsequent convergence of today's work realities around the globe that should not go unnoticed. In essence, the current trend, despite being disruptive and heavily criticized, can indeed prove helpful in bringing about a sense of a new global "We are all in this together" ethos that can help realize unprecedented collaborative arrangements and innovative organizational designs that will incentivize and source global solution approaches to today's inherently complex and grand challenges.

## **4. New Kids on the Block: Applying an Interorganizational Ecology Perspective to the Global Diffusion of Organizational Forms**

### **4.1. Abstract**

The by-now omnipresent and largely taken-for-granted diffusion of organizational forms thought to advance market formation and socioeconomic development (particularly in transition and new-minted market economies) in various economic regions around the globe is well documented. Yet organizational sociologists lack a systematic framework for assessing the profound impact that these nonnative forms can have on the evolutionary trajectory of the organizational context in the adopting locale. By modelling this organizational dimension of global diffusion processes with concepts and empirical insights from population ecology, an evolutionary process model emerges that theorizes effects of form diffusion on firms that adopt nonnative forms, on the forms

themselves and on the adopting organizational context — or, as population ecologists would call it, the community ecology — as a whole.

## **4.2. Introduction**

Organizational forms are indispensable solution approaches to a society in tackling its complex problems (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Ruef, 2000). Their unique features are powerful blueprints that structure organizations, direct their actions and coordinate collective action in a recognizable and distinguishable way (Carroll & Hannan, 2000; Scott & Davis, 2007). Like the architect who carefully saves design work in a drawing cabinet, a society has a repository of forms that its organizations can be modeled on. There are two processes that help societies to update and upgrade their organizational environment in order to keep up with the pulse of the times and make sure that constant institutional change and technological progress are transformed into socioeconomic advancement: through the creation of new, homegrown forms from within communal, regional or national boundaries (Lewin, Long, & Carroll, 1999; Romanelli, 1991; Ruef, 2000) and through the importation and adoption of nonnative forms from across boundaries (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005; Djelic, 1998). Both processes are equally common and have caught researchers' attention. Yet a systematic framework to comprehend the impacts that the diffusion of organizational forms have — a phenomena that has by now reached global scale — on both form-level change and the organizational context of the adopting locale is notably absent from the diffusion literature and remains poorly understood, despite its significance for market formation and socioeconomic development (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Moran & Ghoshal, 1999; Scott & Davis, 2007).

Consider for a moment the global diffusion of the venture capitalist (VC) form and the entrepreneurial ecologies it symbiotically depends on and nurtures (Thornton, 1999). Initially a

homegrown solution approach from the Boston area, VC firms have evolved from a rough concept geared toward helping revitalize the U.S. economy of the late 1920s — a local response to a complex problem — into what they are today, a key driver for U.S. economic growth, international comparative advantage and innovation (Hsu & Kenney, 2005). The VC firm alone, however, was not a guarantor of economic prosperity; instead it co-evolved in the context of an array of other organizations — among the most vital to its success were law firms, large high-tech firms, universities and research laboratories (Ferrary & Granovetter, 2009) — that ultimately found an effective fit in specific geographically bounded locations, so-called innovation clusters (Kenney & Patton, 2006). Not surprisingly, VC firms have become one of the most successful U.S. exports (Ernest & Young, 2014), and researchers have traced the diffusion and adoption of this distinctive form to economic regions as diverse as China (Ahlstrom & Bruton, 2003), Japan (Kenney et al., 2002), Kenya (Gugu & Mutua Mworira, 2016) and Brazil (de Lima Ribeiro & Gledson de Carvalho, 2008), to mention just a few.

To be sure, the global diffusion process is not confined to just a few forms. It rather seems endemic, and similar instances of adoption can be observed across a wide range of highly successful forms (Drori, Meyer, & Hwang, 2006), including development organizations (Watkins et al., 2012), social businesses (Kerlin, 2010), microfinance institutions (Yunus, 1999), franchise organizations (Bradach, 1998), accelerators (Dutt et al., 2015), e-commerce firms (Amit & Zoot, 2001) and the multidivisional form (Djelic, 2004). Note, however, that forms are rarely stand-alone solutions; they are rather modular components that have emerged and evolved as part of a spatially bounded and interdependent system. Put differently, the survival and success of a firm of any given form is dependent on its inter- and co-action — its functional integration — with a host of ancillary organizations of same, similar and dissimilar forms which collectively produce more than the sum of their parts (Astley, 1985; Astley & Fombrun, 1983; Rao, 2005). In

consequence, attention shifts to an appreciation of the organizational context that economic exchange and collective action take place in. Thus, once nonnative forms become imported and adopted by de novo or de alio firms (i.e., new challenger firms or incumbents), these forms also become part of an entirely new organizational context — prompting the question, What are the mechanisms that govern the transition of nonnative organizational forms into new organizational contexts?

Surprisingly, the wealth of existing diffusion research has rarely focused on the role played by the organizational context in the transmission of objects. Why? Existing research has placed meticulous attention on what happens when objects diffuse to new technical, social, cultural, political or economic contexts, which, as it has been argued, greatly affects (non-)adoption, translation, assimilation and implementation (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005; Drori, 2008; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). But little emphasis has been placed on another important dimension — the preexisting organizational context of the adopting locale to which an object diffuses. The functional roles organizations hold, the problems they solve and the complexity of tasks a collective of organizations is able to shoulder have rather been treated as backgrounds or have taken the form of implicit and untested assumptions, even though, as forms become adopted by firms in new locales, the condition of the organizational context will have a profound effect on their survival and success. Put differently, little is known about the underlying processes that mediate the integration of new, nonnative organizational forms into preexisting organizational contexts — “new kids on the block” — and the actual effects of the introduction on the firms that adopt them, the forms themselves and on the organizational context as a whole — not to mention the impacts it may also have on wider market formation and economic vibrancy (Moran & Ghoshal 1999).

This paper sets out to model the organizational context by developing an interorganizational ecology perspective on global diffusion studies that draws on insights from population and community ecology research. In more detail, three units of analysis, namely organizational form, organizational population and community ecology (for a comprehensive review and detailed explanations of each unit, see Rao 2005; Baum & Rao 2001; Hannan et al. 2007; Carroll & Hannan 2000) help capture not only the persisting, systemic and at times staggering differences and dissimilarities in the demography of organizations across boundaries (Bartelsman, Scarpetta, & Schivardi, 2005) — suggesting that functional roles organizations play and the problems they solve may vary across community ecologies — but also draw attention to spatially situated and path-dependent inter- and co-action patterns that govern economic exchange — the complexity of tasks that can be dealt with — and that affect successful form integration (Biggart & Guillén, 1999; Biggart & Delbridge, 2004; Geertz, 1963). An evolutionary process model theorizes the mechanisms at play once nonnative forms become part of new community ecologies and does so by distinguishing between three phases: adoption, transition and evolutionary outcomes. The key insights are that organizational forms emerge from and evolve in location-specific community ecologies and are thus imprinted with distinct core properties, such as, for instance, the reliance on a specific inter- and co-action pattern with a particular number of input and output partners for survival and success (Schilling & Steensma, 2001). Once forms travel and become adopted in new and dissimilar community ecologies, their core properties do not align with community characteristics and thus transitional friction arises, setting in motion a dynamic process toward integration or rejection. Contingent upon success in navigating these processes and bearing the adaptation costs, the evolutionary outcomes allow diffusion researchers to gauge the consequences and long-term effects that the importation of nonnative forms can have on a community ecology's diversity and vibrancy.

### **4.3. Diffusion of forms and the hidden organizational context**

This paper sets out on a path toward a deeper appreciation of an additional contextual dimension in the diffusion of objects across boundaries — the organizational context. To be sure, scholars from a variety of academic disciplines have emphasized the need to more explicitly study the mechanisms and effects at play once nonnative organizational forms are imported, recognizing that the distinct composition and configuration of organizational contexts can create friction in the immigration of forms. Their work identifies path dependence as the single most dominant factor that explains the typical chasm between contexts which severely complicates cross-border adoption (Biggart & Guillén, 1999; Djelic & Ainamo, 1999; Geertz, 1963; Kuran, 2011).

In the next paragraphs a brief review of existing academic work on organizational form, the global diffusion of organizational forms and their organizational contexts to which they diffuse will follow in order to showcase the need for further academic work in this intriguing realm.

#### **4.3.1. Organizational Form**

What defines an organizational form? Central to the concept are their core properties (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Individual organizations' surface-level features (product design, number and size of sub-units, geographical distribution, etc.) are at a lower unit of analysis and may vary. At a higher unit of analysis, the organization's unvarying core architecture materializes, allowing differentiation and categorization into, for example, organizations of same, similar and unlike forms or into classifications, such as, venture capitalist, e-commerce retailer or business incubator (Carroll & Hannan, 2000). These schemes define membership and functional roles in a production system and assign an externally enforced and recognized social identity. As a result, substantial alterations to an organization's core architecture are judged critically and are perceived as violations by internal (e.g., shareholders and employees) and the external audience



(e.g., input partners, media and associations) who enforce this kind of coherence (Hannan et al., 2007; Rao & Kenney, 2008). The organizational core is defined (1) stated goals that constitute the basis for mobilizing legitimacy and other resources to achieve the mission, (2) forms of authority that denote intra- and interorganizational exchange mechanisms, (3) core technologies encoded in capital investment, virtual and physical infrastructure and the skills and knowledge of employees and (4) market strategies that reflect the client base for which the production output is intended and ways to mobilize resources (Hannan & Freeman, 1984).

#### **4.3.2. Diffusion of forms: The foreign entrant view**

One of the most prominent research streams has investigated the diffusion of forms from the global “core” to the “periphery;” this diffusion is known as Americanization (Djelic, 1998; Kogut & Parkinson, 1993) or McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1996). Its dominant focus was on the rise and proliferation of large multidivisional firms — corporations — predominately after World War II through internationalization efforts and on the adoption of this form in new economic terrain (Djelic, 2004). Externally induced institutional change through economic liberalization, privatization and marketization policies driven by the Bretton Woods Institutions in conjunction with low-cost information and communication technologies unlocked new resource niches in many economies around the globe, increasing the potential customer pool for products of mass-market multinational companies and enabling so-called Nikefication, the division of production into sub-components and their outsourcing to distant offshore locations (Davis, 2009).

Two prominent concepts emerged in the international business literature as expressions of the differences and dissimilarities between home and host economic regions — the foreign entrant view. The concept institutional distance described the varying degrees of dissimilarity between the institutional profiles of two countries that affect intraorganizational practice

diffusion (Kostova, 1999). The concept of institutional voids captured the experience of foreign managers in emerging markets where the absence of taken-for-granted “specialized intermediaries, regulatory systems and contract-enforcing mechanisms” (Khanna & Palepu, 1997: 63) rendered recognized market strategies ineffective.

#### **4.3.3. Adoption of forms: The domestic view**

Unlike the studies that took the foreign-entrant view, studies that started with the perspective of the domestic, receiving end documented a remarkable diversity of novel organizational forms that were imported, adopted and integrated. This research, however, was only rarely linked to diffusion studies and instead involved a range of other research traditions. It developed important insights into the outcomes of diffusion (i.e., what happens once novel objects are adopted in a new context) at the adopting locale.

Rao and Hirsch’s insightful work (2003), for example, on the economic transition of the Czech Republic paid close attention to the political and organizational context in which nonnative organizational forms became embedded in. The investigators observed that populating a nonnative form became in fact a contested struggle for economic power between *de novo* and *de alio* firms. Grabher and Stark (1997) pointed to preexisting inter-firm networks and the unique wiring of an organizational ecology cast as an institutional legacy prone to structural inertia and therefore hindering the transformation and harmonization of institutions in post-socialist Hungary. An intriguing corollary states that externally introduced change has to interact with deeply entrenched and path-dependent organizing logics, spurring local re-configurations and re-combinations that, indeed, gives rise to unique variations of capitalism (Stark, 1996).

Most intriguing is the diffusion of Silicon Valley–type models around the world. Subsumed under the label of technology entrepreneurship (Beckman et al., 2012), top-down

“artificially” installed and bottom-up organically growing innovation clusters are en vogue globally. Their goal is to emulate the network effects and ecological dynamics of successful referents, thus leading to the massive importation of novel, nonnative organizational forms<sup>14</sup>. Consider the start-up process alone, for example, in which forms such as incubators, accelerators, consultancies, startup studios, maker spaces, venture builders, VC firms and a host of conferences, associations and competitions have different, albeit overlapping, functional roles and competences.

Taken together, the increased interconnectedness and entanglement between economic regions enhances the dynamic flow of organizational forms across national boundaries. In particular, as economies around the world respond to fundamental environmental transitions the global exchange of organizational forms in search of the best solution to a given problem is likely to continue to grow — even though existing research hints at currently hidden dynamics that suggest that the sheer importation of organizational forms is not enough to ensure for successful cross-boundary emulation. A closer examination of the organizational context holds the promise of new insights.

#### **4.3.4. The hidden organizational context**

Comparative studies that have focused on organizational contexts across national boundaries have strikingly demonstrated the path-dependency of organizing and organizations. The claim is that the emergence and evolution of particular forms of organizing are tightly connected to historically contingent organizing logics that are tethered to a distinct locale (Lewin et al., 1999; Lomi & Larsen, 1996). These logics become instantiated in form-specific properties that

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<sup>14</sup> See for a list of examples these intriguing publication: Costa Rica (Ciravegna, 2012), Kenya (Ndemo & Weiss, 2016), the Middle East (Schroeder, 2013) and Israel (Senor & Singer, 2011).

authorize and legitimate particular interorganizational tie formations, configuring in the aggregate a situated web of diverse organizations in a particular region — a robust and spatially bounded community ecology that is partially buffered from external pressures (Astley, 1985; Rao, 2005).

Academic work has vividly illustrated that singular institutional or technological changes, indeed even imitating successful but nonnative forms of organizing, can face significant barriers in trying to profoundly change the way organizations cooperate, interact and build relationships (Biggart & Guillén, 1999; Geertz, 1963; Grabher & Stark, 1997). Biggart and Guillén (1999) asserted in their comparative study of automobile industries in South Korea, Taiwan, Spain and Argentina that each economic region follows a different organizing logic that introduces deeply entrenched variations across the regions by virtue of distinct and location-specific solution repositories. Even conscious efforts to emulate seemingly superior organizational solutions from other regions turned out to be ineffective, because each solution approach was contingent on the organizational ecology's composition and configuration. Similarly, Saxenian (1994) asserts that the pattern of social organizing enacted, enforced and reproduced by a diverse set of organizational populations collectively determines the economic output and innovation capability. Kuran (2011) pointed to the institutional environment and linked the absence of large corporations in the Middle East to the legacy and configuration of traditional economic institutions, connecting Islamic law to the region's present-day ubiquity of rather atomistic, small and short-term commercial enterprises. Further, in their comparative study across three countries, Djelic and Ainamo (1999) equally underline the co-evolution of environmental changes and organizational forms and show how change was mirrored in form-level adaptation across countries, yet the scale of such changes and how they became instantiated in altered blueprints differed substantially from country to country. In fact, as Ruef (2000) documented, mutations of existing forms or the emergence of entirely new forms needs to be understood as spatially

situated intra-community responses to environmental shifts geared at re-aligning organizational populations with evolving opportunity structures (Lewin et al., 1999; Ruef, 2000).

In sum, placing the diffusion and adoption of organizational forms in a broader organizational context reveals three important insights. First, the emergence and evolution of organizational forms has to be conceptualized as a historically contingent process, resulting in region-specific repositories of solution approaches. Second, organizational forms are couched in distinct systems of multiplex inter-organizational relationships — such as functional interdependence, learning and competition — motivating an interorganizational ecology perspective on the study of the impact of nonnative forms on adopting communities in order to closely gauge form-, population- and community-level changes. (Astley & Fombrun, 1983). Third, economic regions demonstrate persistent and systemic differences in their organizing logic (e.g., dominance of market, hierarchy, network forms and formal or informal firms) and significant variation in their organizational demography (e.g., number of forms, firms and communities), which in turn creates friction in altering the regions' capabilities through the importation of nonnative organizational forms (Kim, Hongseok, & Swaminathan, 2006). An interorganizational ecology perspective is thus attentive to the peculiar composition of organizational contexts and the configuration of organizational form properties. It sees opportunities for adaptation and variation where dissimilarities, incompatibilities and a poor structural fit between nonnative forms and adopting communities arise. These significant points prompted the development of the interorganizational ecology perspective proposed in this paper and the development of an evolutionary process model in order to capture the mechanisms at play when nonnative forms become adopted in new organizational contexts.

#### **4.4. Applying an interorganizational ecology perspective to global diffusion studies**

Organizations and their actions are prominent features on contemporary societies' center stage. In fact, the centrality of these influential constituents often leaves one to wonder what the dependent and independent variables really are (Perrow, 1991). Ecology theorists hone in on the rise and demise of organizations and set out to read the composition and changes of organizational contexts — the demography of organizations — as proxies for profound sociological processes (Carroll & Hannan, 2000). The generative question of why are there so many kinds of organizations (Hannan & Freeman, 1977) begins theorizing from the stance of diversity and variation rather than convergence and homogeneity. For meaningful analyses to take place, population ecologists shift away from the study of single actors and focus on the aggregate, thereby introducing three units of analysis to the study of organizational contexts whose effects on each level have implications for the others: organizational form, organizational population and community ecology. Understanding these three levels as co-evolving with their external environment (e.g., regulatory, cultural or technical) rather than as static structures shows which forms are the fittest and which are most inert or resistant to change; which organizational populations faces severe selection effects, resulting in high mortality rates; which unexploited resource niches crowd organizations in; and which kinds of mutations occur to a form's "gene pool" over time (Lewin et al., 1999).

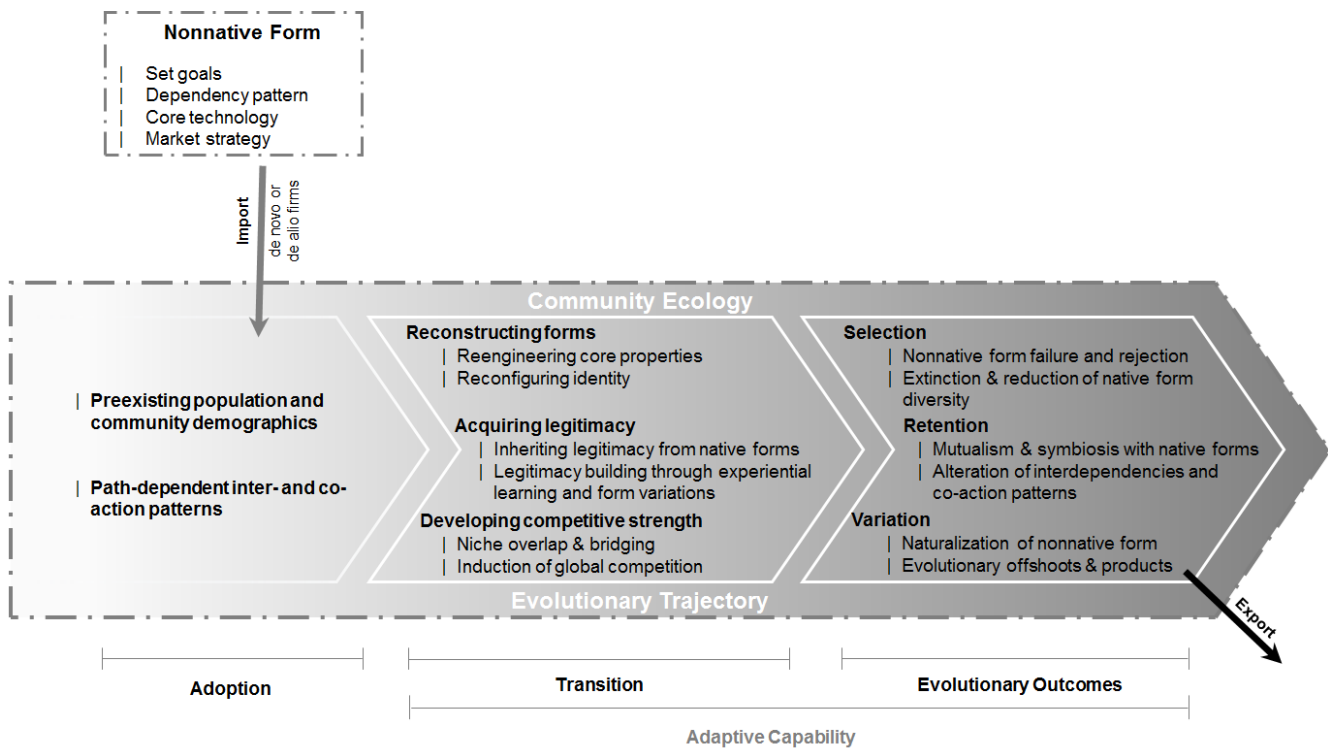
The immigration and adoption of forms are vital events that bear the potential to add new functional competences to an adopting community and thus induce change that is, subject to their successful integration, likely to have profound impacts on the community's evolutionary trajectory — the selection, retention and variation of a host of organizations. Rather than casting organizational change and form emergence as a response to selection pressures, institutional

change or technological progress which suggests a co-evolutionary process within ecological boundaries (for excellent examples, see the work of Lewin et al. 1999; Ruef 2000), the introduction of a nonnative form from across ecological boundaries follows a different evolutionary trajectory which requires distinct theorization.

These insights prompted the development of an evolutionary process model that starts theorization from an interorganizational ecology perspective. The process model (see Figure 4) reads from right to left and is partitioned into three phases: adoption, transition and evolutionary outcomes. Looking at the community level sharpens the focus on functional integration and functional interdependences, thus the interorganizational relationships and key interdependencies between organizations of same, similar and dissimilar form (Rao, 2005). This perspective helps draw a semi-permeable boundary around a set of interacting populations, suggesting the image of a vibrant community system in which the constituents share a collective fate and successful interactions guarantees survival and a degree of insulation from external pressures (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006). This perspective provides also an analytical lens to study stability and change within and across populations over time as well as to gauge the impact external forces have on the evolution of populations and the broader community (i.e., institutional change, technological progress, organizational variation or the introduction of nonnative forms) (Astley, 1985; Lewin et al., 1999; Ruef, 2000). Here, the importation and adoption of nonnative forms by *de novo* or *de alio* firms marks the beginning of the model and launches a distinct evolutionary process in the adopting community ecology. In short, the nonnative form — equipped with its own distinctive properties — becomes part of a preexisting organizational population and community ecology. Because of dissimilarities between the form's native and adopting communities, that is, the poor fit between nonnative form-specific properties and adopting community characteristics friction in the integration arises that put the survival and success of firms adopting nonnative forms at risk.

Why? In the transition phase, unique mechanisms set firms of a nonnative form on a nondeterministic but rather dynamic path towards integration into the new community ecology with the potential of incurring significant adaptation costs. The last phase — evolutionary outcomes — lays out the various changes that can occur to both nonnative and native forms, to the various organizational populations involved as well as the community as a whole. In the following section, the adoption, transition and evolutionary outcomes phase will be explored in more detail.

**Figure 4: Evolutionary Process Model**





## 4.5. Adoption

The adoption phase demarcates induces change in the adopting community's evolutionary trajectory as imitative entrepreneurs import a novel, and nonnative organizational form. Put differently, a new functional role and specific competences are added to the locale. Firms that adopt a nonnative form not only seek to imitate the form's core properties, which are seen as necessary preconditions for success, but are also confronted with an organizational ecology that has yet to integrate, accommodate and meet the requirements on which the form's success is contingent. The entrepreneurs thus face an uphill battle in ensuring both that the originality of the nonnative form as a distinct and recognizable entity is preserved and continues to resemble its highly successful original referents and that the firm's functional integration into a web of cooperative ties with ancillary organizations can be engineered and reproduced (Aldrich & Martinez, 2010).

To further contextualize this dynamic, the interorganizational ecology perspective places its analytical focus on three characteristics: the core properties of the nonnative form, the demography of the organizational population and community ecology and the inter- and co-action pattern economic exchange is embedded in — the adopting community ecology's internal wiring.

Dissimilarities between a form's native and adopting community reveals that variation can occur across a number of factors, such as the total number of forms and sub-forms, organizational population size and density or geographical location (e.g., urban versus rural, concentrated versus dispersed industrial region and market distance). The community's composition puts on display which organizations are an abundant resource and which are scarce. It further shows which functional roles within a community are taken care of and what kind of organizational demographic (i.e. age, size, lifecycle and number of organizations) solves

functional problems (e.g., logistics, marketing or retailing). Further, the inter- and co-action pattern of the adopting community focuses on the preexisting organizational relationships: the commensalistic or symbiotic ties in a community (Astley & Fombrun, 1983). Commensalism denotes co-action of firms of a similar organizational form, which creates potential for competition once resource niches overlap, or mutualism, in which the presence of both kinds of organizations is mutually beneficial. Conversely, symbiosis denotes the positive interdependence and interaction of dissimilar forms, in which firms that occupy dissimilar niches benefit from each other's presence (Baum & Rao, 2001). Over time, inter-firm networks and interdependencies with organizations of same, similar and dissimilar forms evolve into robust exchange patterns of input and output supply, information transmission and mutual learning that enable a sub-division of tasks into modular components, conditioning the emergence of recognized, interlinked and mutually reinforcing functional roles and thus allows organizations to collectively tackle more complex problems. It is the scarcity or absence of organizations that should solve a focal firm's peripheral problems that creates situations in which needed relationships are dysfunctional or nonexistent, thus affecting firm success and requiring the adaptation of form-specific properties.

Why does this matter? A defining property of any organizational form is its dependency pattern (i.e., forms of authority), which guides interorganizational relationship building and functional integration (Beard & Dess, 1988; Schilling & Steensma, 2001). Consider a firm of a particular form — an e-commerce retailer, for example — that is dependent on firms of dissimilar forms for learning (e.g., marketing agencies and research institutes), input materials (e.g., producers) or deliveries (e.g., logistic and transportation firms), such as large transportation firms with an extended reach in order to ensure timely and reliable delivery of products to both urban and rural clients. When these firms of particular size, competence, experience (i.e., age and

lifecycle) and geographical reach are in short supply or simply nonexistent the integration of the nonnative form is at risk and the form-specific dependency pattern has to be altered, with potential repercussions for other core properties. In other words, if peripheral problems (in this case efficient logistic and supply chain solutions) are not effectively solved by the preexisting organizational populations in the adopting community ecology, a firm's survival and success is at risk, unless form level properties are adapted to incorporate peripheral problems and develop new, previously unforeseen competences.

The adopting community ecology thus does not only expose firms of nonnative forms to radically different demographics and inter- and co-action patterns but also impacts the form-level core properties as firms have to adapt to these variations and dissimilarities. Further, as firms modeled on nonnative forms interact with preexisting organizations intracommunity-level competition and legitimacy effects are set free that can either complicate or facilitate the transition of these novel forms. These processes will be further contextualized and addressed in the transition phase.

## **4.6. Transition**

The transition phase focuses on three mechanisms: reconstructing the nonnative form to achieve an effective structural fit with the adopting community, acquiring legitimacy in the new ecology and finally developing competitive strength.

### **4.6.1. Reconstructing forms**

The foundational conception of forms in organizational ecology studies and the more recent linguistic turn it has taken open up two different ways of thinking about form adaptation and change. The first directs attention to form-specific core properties and the structural fit of

nonnative forms with preexisting characteristics of the adopting community ecology. In logical consequence, a lack of fit between form-specific dependency pattern and the adopting community's inter- and co-action patterns call for adaptation — the reengineering of form properties. The second, linguistic way of thinking about forms directs attention to organizational forms as cultural objects — recognized social identities enforced by internal and external audiences to the firm (for detail explanations see Hannan et al., 2007). The focus here lies on the relational construction of roles and identities through cultural editing and configuration of form properties by internal and external audiences in the adopting community (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002). Both positivist and constructivist ontology promise intriguing ways to develop new theory.

#### *4.6.1.1. Reengineering core properties*

To ensure effective coordination and exchange, form-specific inter- and co-action patterns crystallize that are tailored to the demography of a form's native community ecology, authorizing and guiding all necessary interorganizational exchanges. Much like a mirror, the form's inter- and co-action pattern becomes a reflection of the organizing logic of the form's native ecology. Particularly during initial form emergence, when form and environment are thought to have been optimally aligned, the inter- and co-action pattern imprints firmly onto the form and becomes a defining property with long-lasting effects on organizational action (Marquis, 2003). Thus, the form-specific dependency pattern can be seen as a sub-category of the broader inter- and co-action pattern that illuminates solely the needed input–output relations — the life lines — that a firm of a given form is dependent on.

Once forms travel to dissimilar ecologies and are adopted by de novo or alio firms, their dependency patterns and organizational environments cease to match — that is, the alignment

between form and environment becomes disrupted. The location--specific dependency pattern, so goes the argument, creates transitional friction by complicating the emulation and smooth transition of the novel form into an adopting ecology. Consider the case of e-commerce retailers such as Amazon, eBay or Alibaba whose efficiency gains over offline firms are dependent on their interaction with a host of organizations in various online and offline community ecologies (Amit & Zoot, 2001). The so-called intermediary layer in the online ecology, for example, ensures basic market functions such as online payment. Without recognized digital payment providers, such as credit card, mobile and online payment firms, running a successful e-commerce firm seems impossible, as experienced, for example, during the economic crisis in Greece when the use of PayPal was severely limited (Banjo, 2015) or in African markets where the introduction of online payment firms has been fairly recent (Nsehe, 2014). In a similar vein, e-commerce firms also depend on a strategic network of offline partners. Think of the example above in which effective supply-chain solutions provided by international and domestic logistic firms ensured timely transport of goods to and from firm-owned warehouses. Once these solutions deviate from the original form-specific dependency pattern imprint — meaning that firm for integration are either not available (because of dissimilarities in population and community demographics, for example, caused by such factors as variations in population distribution, firm size, geographical reach or age) or their inter- and co-action patterns differ substantially — transitional friction arises in the form of (unanticipated) adaptation costs. In consequence, the degrees of specialization and of the complexity of input–output relationships become unstable. Dissimilarity thus prompts a reengineering of form-specific core properties to suit the adopting community ecology, leading, for example, to the internalization of supply chain solutions by the e-commerce retailer and the compromising of its high degree of specialization due to vertical integration — a move actually implemented by the Nigerian Amazon clones

Konga and Jumia (Bright, 2016; Gudan, 2015) — or the crowding of dissimilar firms into new niches, such as Uber’s recent move to extend its services beyond personal transportation into logistic services (Kazeem, 2016).

Like transaction costs, adaptation costs are incurred by the adopting firms as they explore and map out the functional roles and competences available in the organizational context, experientially learn about the community ecology’s capabilities and the task complexities it can handle, develop new internal competences and capabilities (e.g., vertical integration of peripheral tasks, knowledge transfer to partners or international sourcing) and thus reengineer the core properties to newly align the organization with its adopting organizational environment. In the absence of an immediate successful referent, the adaptation costs are distributed across the firms that populate the nonnative form, with the corollary that early adopters incur higher costs than late adopters. In essence, the resource niche (i.e., client base or external financing) has to bear the adaptation costs, resulting in lower organizational performance and increasing the likelihood of organizational mortality until the effective structural fit can be successfully reengineered.

#### *4.6.1.2. Reconfiguring identity*

A degree of incompleteness is inherent in imitating successful referents, because the imitators — especially in distant and dissimilar ecologies — suffer from partial knowledge, bounded rationality and environmental uncertainty (Lieberman & Asaba, 2006). Put differently, imitative entrepreneurs may pay particular attention to certain highly visible and observable surface features of a form, but the underlying causal complexities remain hidden and are open to the entrepreneurs’ interpretation. Thus, location-specific comparisons and the underlying causal complexities introduce emulation errors, fallacies and contestation as internal and external audiences in the adopting ecologies try to make sense of the nonnative form’s core properties, its

“recipe for success,” its attributed role, its perceived value in the new locale and the most adequate way to compare it with or differentiate it from similar native forms.

Although imitative entrepreneurs may not have a full understanding of a nonnative form and are therefore likely to learn about and accentuate only certain of its properties, other organizations that populate similar and dissimilar forms can balance out possible emulation errors and fallacies, leading in theory to a more complete and accurate copy. However, depending on the demographics of the adopting community ecology and its interorganizational wiring, power dynamics among internal and external audiences in “who has a say” in functional role and identity definition may shift substantially, distributing definitional and configurational power over the organization’s role and identity disproportionately.

Three mechanisms help to explain this dynamic: associational processes, power redistributions and configuration practices. Associational processes bind firms that adopt a nonnative form to other preexisting forms (Kennedy, 2008; Latour, 1986), thus power redistributions among internal and external audiences can occur, equipping some actors with new power resources to define, configure and enforce identities (Ingram & Simons, 2000). In particular actors’ configuration practices — situated action to engineer a form’s core properties to powerful actors’ predefined ideals (akin to Woolgar's [1990]) — such as coerce those in lower hierarchical ranks into desirable input–output relations may help reproduce power imbalances and protect preexisting inter- and co-action pattern (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006). For example, Rao and Hirsch (2003) have shown that a nonnative form can become part of a contested political power struggle between incumbents and challengers for future resources, profoundly affecting its functional role, identity and meaning in economic coordination and exchanges. As powerful audiences appropriate or contest nonnative forms, core properties and thus also the functional role of forms are likely to change, that is, reconstructed and synthesized in new ways in the

adopting community. In the wake of profound power redistributions, some forms may be left disempowered compared with others and may thus be forced to follow prescriptions from preexisting elites. From an interorganizational ecology perspective, it is important to pay attention to the power structure of organizational contexts and thus the various configuration practices that occur once nonnative forms become re-constructed and adapted.

#### **4.6.2. Acquiring legitimacy**

The interorganizational ecology perspective points to a set of legitimacy acquisition mechanisms that are tied to context-specific processes visible at the population and community level, namely legitimacy inheritance from preexisting native forms — that is, their organizational populations — and legitimacy building through experiential learning and form variations.

##### *4.6.2.1. Inheriting legitimacy from native forms*

Researchers have recognized particularly for specialist organizational forms the idea of legitimacy inheritance from closely related and preexisting organizations of similar forms (Carroll & Hannan, 2000). This mechanism has hitherto received little attention. Although global legitimation effects are likely to encourage the importation and imitation of nonnative organizational forms, firms that adopt such forms are likely to be lumped together with firms of similar forms into preexisting populations, enabling firms to establish cognitive links and thus draw upon their legitimacy gains. These efforts embed forms into cognitive structures and help audiences make sense of novel, nonnative forms and emerging identities (Kennedy, 2008). As a result, adopting firms become exposed to the legitimacy and competition dynamics of preexisting populations before a distinct social identity is recognized by audiences. Thus, in dissimilar community ecologies, associational processes can expose firms that adopt a nonnative forms to



low- or high-density preexisting organizational populations, which can facilitate localized legitimacy transfers that can benefit both forms (i.e., positive interdependence, in which both forms benefit from each other's presence) or create potential rivalry between firms of the novel form and the preexisting forms (i.e., full, partial or predatory competition, in which growth in one population leads to increased mortality rates in the other population). The degrees of dissimilarity between firms of nonnative and associated similar forms will mediate the legitimacy gains that arise from inheritance and determine the costs of establishing a distinct identity.

#### *4.6.2.2. Legitimacy building through experiential learning*

Experiential learning among de novo and de alio firms geared at adapting a nonnative form's core properties to an adopting community ecology (Baum & Shipilov 2006) generates inevitably substantial variation across firms of a single nonnative form and is thus likely to induce ambiguity and uncertainty for internal (e.g., new employees or financiers) and external audiences (e.g., late adopters or clients). Uncertainty arises especially when firm creation and mortality rates are high (as in, for example, nascent industries such as e-commerce) while audiences try to make sense of which variations are likely to succeed in the long run and should therefore receive attention, trust and investment. Hence, as adopting firms try to develop new functional competences and capabilities to enhance structural fit and prospects for success in the adopting community ecology, increased experimentation trials among these firms are likely to affect local legitimacy building for individual firms and thus also for the form as a whole. In other words, resources mobilized to build cognitive legitimacy and trust into the core properties of a nonnative form — through, for example, customer education, media coverage and advertising — may benefit the overall acceptance and anchoring of the form though incur high costs for early adopters. Consider rural populations that leapfrog technologies as an empirical setting where e-

commerce retailers explore variations to build legitimacy and successful referents are so far nonexistent (Bright, 2016). In these cases, the exploration and adaptation costs to demarcate and align core properties with resource niches can be detrimental to firm performance and success.

### **4.6.3. Developing competitive strength**

An interorganizational ecology perspective on diffusion studies separates local and global competition forces and seeks to understand how firms that populate novel, nonnative forms develop competitive strength.

#### *4.6.3.1. Niche overlap and bridging*

Importing forms into dissimilar ecologies is not without its risks. How so? First, by adopting a powerful novel form firms are likely to stir up competitive processes in the adopting community as resource niche overlaps with preexisting organizational populations induce fierce competition pressures. The degree of overlap determines the similarity of the form's dependency pattern on the various resources (e.g., financing, clients, media attention) and thus defines competition intensity (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Low switching and opportunity cost are likely to give firms of nonnative forms a competitive edge over similar preexisting firms ultimately driving organizational form legacies out of the market. Consider the dramatic ramifications of the successful introduction of large (e-commerce) retailers into the domestic retailer landscape — community-level restructuring and high firm mortality of legacy forms was the outcome. Additionally, niche bridging can put some firms at an advantage over others by drawing key resources (i.e., input requirements, such as financial capital, human capital and raw materials) from across community ecology boundaries. In other word, firms may mobilize and coordinate resource inputs from multiple locations, in consequence insulating them from local competition

pressures and providing an advantage over firms that focus predominantly on a local input–output production system. For example, anchoring nonnative forms in Kenya’s technology entrepreneurship ecology has tended to be financed predominantly through resources from other community ecologies, establishing ties across (domestic and transnational) ecological and industry boundaries (Ndemo & Weiss, 2016).

#### *4.6.3.2. Induction of global competition*

Novel, nonnative forms can also be carriers of global competition forces into a vicinity, building awareness of global community membership among local firms and contributing to a global rather than a purely local production function, with profound impacts on interorganizational reference systems, practices and learnings. The entanglement, dependence and interconnection between similar albeit geographically dispersed community ecologies is conducive to cooperation and learning and thus facilitates the importation of additional nonnative forms, promotes task division across boundaries (as in the case, for example, of offshore knowledge services clusters [Manning 2013]) and may induce intercommunity competition as communal resource niches increasingly overlap.

In sum, the importation of nonnative forms triggers profound community-specific processes that influence the smooth transition of the forms into the adopting community. A careful analysis can reveal both form adaptations and community-level changes. The intended, unintended and long-term effects are of particular interest to the diffusion researcher. A focus on the co-evolution between nonnative form and preexisting forms reveals the consequences of global diffusion processes — the evolutionary outcomes — for the adopting community.

## **4.7. Evolutionary Outcomes**

The dynamic evolutionary process and the interaction of nonnative forms with its adopting community can lead to a variety of outcomes that affect the adopting community's demographics, inter- and co-action patterns as well as its total output and contributions to regional or national socioeconomic development. Ecology researchers recognize three mechanisms: selection, retention and variation. Each of these reflect the (un-)anticipated consequences and long-term effects of global diffusion processes.

### **4.7.1. Selection**

Importing nonnative forms bears the risk of activating fierce competition forces and reveals a predatory dimension of the diffusion process. High adaptation costs for firms of nonnative forms bears the risk of exhausting a resource niche's carrying capacity which, in turn, can lead to high mortality rates. In particular the scarcity or absence of needed firms of other forms to ensure effective functional integration can endanger a focal firms' success if substantial alterations to the core properties have to be realized by, for example, vertically integrating peripheral tasks into the firm and thus developing new functional competences and capabilities. These unanticipated costs can make the pursuit of a nonnative form an unsustainable endeavor for the adopting firms. In the end, high firm mortality can lead to the rejection of the nonnative form.

Similarly, high degrees of resource niche similarity between firms of nonnative and preexisting forms, can adversely affect preexisting organizational population sizes and form diversity in the adopting community. As firms of nonnative forms acquire legitimacy, develop competitive strength and dominate resource niches they can drive out organizational legacies, morphing nonnative forms into invasive forms as they develop a predatory character. In consequence, the economic region comes to favor universal over homegrown solution

approaches. Interestingly, recent research has provided important clues that legacy solutions may not be entirely lost but can be subject to reincarnation when seemingly extinct form properties become salvaged and rejuvenated — a notion of adaptation to contemporary environmental demands (Hampel, Tracey, & Weber, 2016).

#### **4.7.2. Retention**

Introducing a nonnative form can also be of communal benefit and enhance the vibrancy of economic exchange in the adopting community ecology by adding new functional roles and competences to the locale as well as upgrading the community's capability to deal with gradually more complex problems. A catalyzing dimension of global diffusion processes thus denotes a successful integration of firms that are model on nonnative forms. Adding a further form to the communal repertoire thus enhances total problem solving competencies and overall communal output. An example comes from firms that have developed novel addressing systems for e-commerce, delivery, transportation and emergency service providers in India, the Middle East and Kenya. Accurate geo-location significantly alters market development and economic vibrancy as it provides an effective solution to a problem that firms typically deem peripheral (Phillips, 2016). As an increasing number of firms solve these seemingly peripheral problems, they uncover and exploit unique opportunity spaces that are of mutual benefit to firms of native and nonnative forms.

#### **4.7.3. Variation**

Subject to its success, an optimally adapted and integrated form becomes part of the adopting community ecology's gene pool, that is, its repository of solutions. Through naturalization a new member joins the community and a native form emerges. This generative dimension of diffusion

sharpens the analytical focus to examine how exploration activities by adopting firms can lead to mutations that produce resilient, locally adapted variants and how the co-evolution of forms in a locale then produces novel forms (Ruef, 2000).

A variety of co-evolution dynamics are at play that reflect different degrees of novelty, such as variation through surface-level feature updates, core property alterations, form adaptation or even form invention. For example, a firm adopting a nonnative form can use other firms of preexisting forms as referents to emulate and entirely reengineer particular properties in order to achieve an effective fit. Similarly, incumbents can infuse or update legacy forms with nonnative form properties (Lieberman & Asaba, 2006). Note, however, that these evolutionary variations require thorough analytical scrutiny in order to understand whether these are merely façade variants (Boli & Elliott, 2008) — that is variations on surface level features without changing the core properties — or indeed distinct forms.

Variation can also lead to the emergence of unprecedented forms through the co-evolution of nonnative and preexisting forms. Competitive or symbiotic interactions can allow evolutionary offshoots and products from two or more parents to emerge, such as hybrids that blend properties forms in order to defy selection pressures and modify nonnative forms into locally adapted solutions that are genuinely in tune with their environment (Djelic & Ainamo, 1999; Ruef, 2000). Such naturalized forms and evolutionary products may then again be subject to exportation and to emulation by external imitative entrepreneurs in other organizational contexts.

#### **4.8. Discussion and Conclusion**

The introduction of a novel, nonnative forms is a vital event (i.e., a first-order effect) that at first glance adds new functional roles and competences, and new ways of exploiting opportunities and organizing input–output relations to help solve the increasingly complex problems that societies

face. The impact of a form's introduction on the adopting community's evolutionary trajectory — the intended, unintended and long-term effects (i.e., its second-order effects) — is, however, less well understood and points to the adaptive capability of community ecologies, that is, their responsiveness, flexibility and absorptive capacity to incorporate nonnative members and convert changes into a gradually more complex and effective communal production function. In particular, a community's path-dependent inter- and co-action pattern and internal structural coherence are both a blessing and a curse for change, because on the one hand they guarantee a degree of resilience (i.e., structural inertia) that can fend off firms that model on invasive forms, but on the other hand they also severely complicate the integration of beneficial forms that promise to enhance economic vibrancy when the forms carry a dissimilar imprint from their community of origin, requiring substantial reorganization of system components in order to make their introduction effective. Comprehending the second-order effects of introducing changes at the receiving end of the transmission process promises to contextualize global form migration and further clarify why form importation can be beneficial to one community system and detrimental to another.

In fact, promising areas for future empirical studies that are both practical and theoretically relevant need to focus on three things, that is, the “hidden” costs that adopting firms face when key ancillary organizations are scarce or nonexistent in the adopting community (with the result that the form's dependency patterns cannot be sustained), the strategies that such firms need to use to gain legitimacy and competitive strength and the actual effects that these micro-level actions have on community ecologies, market formation and socioeconomic development. The practical guiding question for most imitative entrepreneurs today is also a theoretically compelling one, namely, How do you successfully clone companies, such as Amazon or Alibaba, in organizational contexts where ancillary firms like transportation and logistics providers are

either scarce or nonexistent? The interorganizational ecology perspective, with its focus on functional roles, competencies and a community ecology's task complexity, as developed here, provides a pathway to answer this question. It suggests that a focus on building an accurate clone with limited information is only one side of the story and that the other side relies in the difficulty to reengineer an entire system of cooperation and competition that nourishes and thus plugs the firm into a vital web of inter- and co-action with just the "right" number of ancillary firms (Aldrich & Martinez, 2010). Context-specific strategies for working through conditions in which these systems are not in place are highly in demand. In particular, national economies in which the informal sector traditionally takes care of most of the problems society faces will most likely experience a ceiling on the complexity of tasks it can effectively address. Once formal firms grow and their demands on the organizational context become gradually more complex (e.g., on-time delivery or increased product diversity), the functional competence and capacity of small, atomized and informal firms to deal with these requests will likely limit their growth (Moran & Ghoshal, 1999; Webb & Tihanyi, 2009). In order to lift this ceiling, imitative entrepreneurs need new strategies for forming, building and maintaining community ecologies. Luckily, there seems to be light at the end of the tunnel, as the upsurge in platform organizations may provide a promising alternative to costly physical organizational structures by integrating atomized actors into a web of peer-to-peer exchange relations that mobilize collective action with new incentive mechanisms (e.g., ratings and followers); platform organizations may well prove to be a new, low-cost way to unlock vast economic potential in the many, rather young market economies (Davis, 2016).

Finally, it is hoped that an interorganizational ecology perspective can complement the rich insights of institutional and economic development studies (De Soto, 2000; North, 1990; K Weber, Davis, & Lounsbury, 2009) in suggesting a complementary unit of leverage and analysis



— that is organizations and organizing (Scott & Davis, 2007) — in fostering socioeconomic development. This is important because research has strikingly demonstrated that without effective collective action — coordinating and mobilizing dispersed resources — the co-evolution of the three key pillars of technology, institutions and organizations is significantly impaired (Geertz, 1963; Kieser, 1989; Lewin et al., 1999; Ruef, 2000). In light of rapid technological progress and drastic institutional changes, particularly in new-minted market economies, an appreciation and assessment of the preexisting organizational context as a starting point for acknowledging and altering context-specific solution approaches may not only lead to the creation of unprecedented solution options, but also prove more effective than following a standardized prescription list of organizational form imports.

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**6. Appendices**

## Appendix I Transcribed Interviews

ID	Position	Stage	Ventures in Technology	Background	Minutes
E1	Founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	55
E2	Founder	Early	1st venture	Expatriate	90
E3	Founder	Early	2nd venture	Kenyan	66
E4	Founder and angel investor	Growth	Serial entrepreneur	Repatriate	56
E5	Founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	41
E6	Co-founder	Growth	1st venture	Expatriate	23
E7	Co-founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	74
E8	Founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	82
E9	Founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	72
E10	Co-founder	Early	Serial entrepreneur	Expatriate	80
E11	Founder	Early	Serial entrepreneur	Repatriate	42
E12	Co-founder	Early	1st venture	Expatriate	61
E13	Co-founders	Early	Serial entrepreneur	Repatriate	69
E14	Founder	Early	1st venture	Expatriate	51
E15	Founder	Growth	1st venture	Kenyan	85
E16	Co-founder	Early	2nd venture	Kenyan	68
E17	Founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	87
E18	Co-founder	Growth	1st venture	Expatriate	54
E19	Co-founder	Growth	1st venture	Kenyan	90
E20	Co-founder	Exited	1st venture	Kenyan	75
E21	Founder	Early	Serial entrepreneur	Kenyan	80
E22	Co-founder	Growth	2nd venture	Repatriate	74
E23	Co-founder	Early	1st venture	Expatriate	54
E24	Founder	Early	2nd venture	Kenyan	80
E25	Co-founders	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	93
E26	Founder	Failed in Kenya	3rd venture	Expatriate	73
E27	Co-founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	70
E28	CEO	Early	1st venture	Expatriate	72
E29	Co-founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	68
E30	Co-founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	43
E31	Co-founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	71
E32	Founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	68
E33	Founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	58
E34	Founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	54
E35	Founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	74
E36	Founder	Early	1st venture	Expatriate	58
E37	Founder	Growth	1st venture	Expatriate	30
E38	Co-founder	Growth	1st venture	Expatriate	59
E39	Co-founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	60

E40	Founder	Early	1st venture	Expatriate	40
E41	Founder	Early	1st venture	Expatriate	78
E42	Founder	Early	2nd venture	Kenyan	72
E43	Ex-CEO and founder	Early	2nd venture	Kenyan	110
E44	Co-founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	79
E45	Founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	111
E46	Founder	Early	1st venture	Expatriate	61
E47	Co-founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	55
E48	Hustler		Hustler	Kenyan	80
E49	Founder	Early	1st venture	Kenyan	73
E50	Co-founders	Growth	2nd venture	Kenyan and repatriate	82
E51	Co-founders	Early	2nd venture	Expatriate and repatriate	64

**Investors (*N* = 8, 455 minutes)**

<b>ID</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Fund type</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Minutes</b>
I1	Investment fund manager	Domestic VC fund	Expatriate	60
I2	Investment fund manager	International VC fund	Expatriate	64
I3	Investment fund manager	International VC fund	Expatriate	60
I4	Investment fund manager	Domestic VC fund	Expatriate	38
I5	COO	International impact fund	Expatriate	64
I6	Investment fund manager	Domestic VC fund	Expatriate	60
I7	Investment fund manager	International PE fund	Kenyan	53
I8	Investment fund manager	Domestic VC fund	Expatriate	56

**Industry Experts (*N* = 18, 1134 minutes)**

<b>ID</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Minutes</b>
X1	Co-founder	Consultant	Expatriate	40
X2	Partner	Consultant	Kenyan	53
X3	Director	MNC	Expatriate	52
X4	Fellow	Consultant	Expatriate	61
X5	Africa representative	MNC	Expatriate	65
X6	Managing director for East Africa	MNC	Repatriate	12



X7	Self-employed	Consultant	Kenyan	61
X8	Consultant, investment advisor, farmer and CEO	All-rounder	Kenyan	69
X9	CEO, founder, investor and Consultant	All-rounder	Expatriate	61
X10	Managing director for East Africa	MNC	Kenyan	77
X11	Long-time employee, co-founder and advisor	Senior expert	Kenyan	79
X12	East and Southern Africa lead	MNC	Expatriate	94
X13	General manager	Senior expert	Kenyan	44
X14	Investor and founder	All-rounder	Expatriate	70
X15	Director	Senior expert	Kenyan	91
X16	Founder and consultant	All-rounder	Kenyan	42
X17	Founder and consultant	All-rounder	Kenyan	63
X18	Former managing director, consultant and founder	All-rounder	Kenyan	100

## Appendix II Detailed Components of Templates and Empirical Markers

### II-A: Individual Characteristics

<b>Hustling entrepreneurship ethos</b>		↔	<b>Professional tech entrepreneurship ethos</b>	
<u>Empirical markers and illustrations</u>	<u>Elements</u>	↔	<u>Elements</u>	<u>Empirical markers and illustrations</u>
Necessity, obligation, outcome focused, entrepreneurship is just another job and “Lifestyle business”	Entrepreneurship is instrumental to income generation	↔	Entrepreneurship as self-realization	Emancipation, self-determination, process focused, “Focus on what you want to do”, “I am an entrepreneur by heart”, “not driven by money” and “it is about your skill and your drive”
Adhoc opportunity exploitation, you take what you get, spread across sectors, “doing odd jobs” and obedience to status	Jack of all Trades	↔	Well-Rounded Manager	“f you are trained in a start-up, you learn everything... you don’t specialize in anything”, capabilities in all aspects of the business and expertise generates authority
Resource preservation & diversification, risk mitigation, cross-subsidization of activities and “protection from shocks”	Hedging	↔	Single-mindedness	Living and breathing the business, business first and only, passion, “sacrifice for the company” and unconditional commitment
Failure avoidance, failing others, “its expensive to make mistakes”, survival and intransparent	Stigma of mistakes	↔	Idealizing failure	Accepting risk of failure, “taking a bet”, source of learning, inevitable part of entrepreneurial process and transparency
Revenue –based and consumer growth, conservative and longevity	Organic growth mindset	↔	Disruptive Growth mindset	Scaling paradigm, IPO, buyout, equity capital mindset, user-based growth (traction) and every app can cause a revolution

## II-B: Entrepreneurial Process

<b>Divergent entrepreneurial process</b>		↔	<b>Convergent entrepreneurial process</b>	
<u>Empirical markers and illustrations</u>	<u>Elements</u>		<u>Elements</u>	<u>Empirical markers and illustrations</u>
Entertaining unrelated business ideas at any time and simultaneous opportunity exploitation	Multiple opportunities solved through concurrent entrepreneurship	↔	Multiple Opportunities solved through sequential entrepreneurship	Serial entrepreneurship, sequential problem solving and singular business focus
"They have a company that has three portions – real estate, agriculture and education", ad hoc diversification and resource buffer	Traditional side-businesses remain because of non-divestment	↔	"Cut your losses"	Pivoting, optimization, specialization and core competences
exploration of unaddressed need, North-South benchmarking and "we've been driven very much by the things that we see and observe and get frustrated over ourselves"	New side businesses arise from abundant opportunities	↔	Need for identification, focus and exploitation of niche	Saturated market, regulated market environment, first mover principle and strategic capabilities
"In the US, they just assume that there is a supply chain...In this market we had to build one", exploration and exploitation	New side businesses arise from peripheral business problems	↔	Peripheral problems are solved through contracting	Functional interdependence, contracting out and strategic partnerships
Passive, hands-off, lower stake investments and entrepreneurial discretion	Financier enforces repayment	↔	Investor force business focus	Active, involvement, patient, control, ownership, accountability and business discipline

## II-C: Relationship Management

### Management through relational trust



### Management through contractual interest alignment

#### Empirical markers and illustrations

Superiority of social exchanges, interpersonal networks, relational contracting and “all the kinds of [accountability] systems that they would have in Washington or in New York. Those systems tend to be useless in our market.”

Relationship management, interpersonal trust building, reciprocity and “It’s much more important to have the people you work with be people that you trust and people that you’re comfortable working with than necessarily having somebody that has the right training.”

Social control & pressure, long term relationships, identity building & protection and “So referrals and recommendations in this country mean a lot. I learnt why, it’s because I wouldn’t want to refer somebody to you that would wreck my main image to you, and I’ve created a good image with you.”

#### Elements

Social embeddedness of business relationships

Relational loyalty as substitute for performance record

Relationships as safeguard for performance delivery



#### Elements

Firm objectives superior to personal relationships

Public visibility as substitute for performance record

Incentive & contracts as safeguard for performance delivery

#### Empirical markers and illustrations

Organizational objectives come first, personal goals are secondary, objectification and “governance was very important in basically creating a structure of accountability”

Identity construction, reputation management, personal brand building, social media and strategic public communication

Incentive plans, performance based salaries, equity based compensation, monitoring and contracts as institution

## II-D: Enterprise Evaluation

### Evaluation based on assets and revenue



### Evaluation based on growth potential

<u>Empirical markers and illustrations</u>	<u>Elements</u>
General valuation metrics, comparison and equity pricing based on unlike enterprises, "local investors are spoilt. So basically, they are used to investing in tangible things and that's a psyche; it's a mind-set."	Reference category are brick & mortar businesses
Market share, revenue, assets, collateral and profit margin	Absent viable exit routes lead to pricing on business fundamentals
Making profit targets success indicators, revenue led growth, "grow it through the business" and quest for solid performance	Conservative
Arbitrary, intransparent, "take it or leave it", "raw deal", "I will take 95 % of your company", information asymmetry, absence of professional domestic risk investors and absence of competition	Valuation based on idiosyncratic characteristics without clear categories



<u>Elements</u>	<u>Empirical markers and illustrations</u>
Within ICT category comparison	Industry-specific metrics, future cash flow projections, sales growth, traction, conversion rate, comparison based on same & similar enterprises
Vibrant exit market allows market pricing	"The market is as good as its exits", future market value, strategic value for potential buyers and public trading
High risk & speculative	Equity investment as proxy for success, externally funded growth trajectory, potential for exponential growth, "spray and pray" and quest for outperformer (unicorn)
Valuation based on established comparables within categories	Industry benchmarks and norms, standardized, support network, information sharing and existence of sizeable VC/PE population

## II-E: Institutional Environment

	<b>Economic development logic</b>	↔	<b>Economic leadership logic</b>	
<b><u>Empirical markers and illustrations</u></b>	<b><u>Elements</u></b>		<b><u>Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Empirical markers and illustrations</u></b>
“US model in Kenya”, outward active learning, benchmarking, the World Bank, trust in foreign expertise & experts, foreign role models and dominance of Global North solutions	Relationship local & foreign: Higher Authority of the foreign	↔	Relationship local & foreign: Higher Authority of the local	Local talent, trusted, legitimated expertise, inward learning from peers, setting standards and superiority of local solutions
“Testing the waters”, “we’ll see if it’s worth it to move in, in three, five or ten years”, hesitant, reserved, short-term, learning, side-show and independence from local context	Foreign commitment is provisional	↔	Magnet for foreign resources	Global attractiveness, hot spot, human talent, desire to establish permanent presence, financial resources, determined, secure and long-term interest
“We, Kenyans”, identity construction in contrast to externals, patriotism, collective boundary work, emphasis of the unique and the African moment	Construction of independent identity	↔	Identity is self-evident	“Others make a comparison to me”, intuitive, unquestioned and ethno-centric identity construction & refinement
New constitution, contract law & enforcement in the process of institutionalization, old elite power structures, lack of trust in institutions and ethnic favoritism	Ongoing constitution of government apparatus	↔	Government enables market economy	Liberalization, facilitation, lax regulation, international competitiveness, subsidies, strategic investments, institutionalized regulatory system, preaching importance of risky ventures for society and international broadcasting of success stories
Strong presence of third sector donor organizations, “NGO capital of Africa”, grant capital, “donor driven”, agenda setting, co-existence of welfare and business logic, hybrid organizations, BoP markets, recipient mentality, donor’s darling and “free money”	Expansive role of third sector	↔	Business centrism	Superiority of business solutions to address all problems, private sector is in the driver’s seat, economic prosperity through entrepreneurship, financial sustainability, reliability, accountability and trust in market mechanisms

## 6.1. Appendix III: Interviewer overview

<b>Kenyan interviewees</b>			
<b>ID</b>	<b>Official work title</b>	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Time</b>
K1	Business development manager	Equity Finance	58
K2	Hustler	-	80
K3	Founder & CEO	E-commerce	73
K4	Founder & COO	Financial Technology	79
K5	Consultant, CEO, trainer & farmer	various	69
K6	Founder & CEO	Financial Technology	80
K7	Founder & CEO	Mobile Technology	82
K8	Founder & CEO	various	74
K9	Founder & CEO	Software Development	74
K10	Founder & CTO	Software Development	58
K11	Founder & CEO	various	54
K12	Regional manager & entrepreneur	Consultancy services	53
K13	Founder & CEO	E-commerce	66
K14	Founder & CEO	Gaming	82
K15	Founder & CEO	E-commerce	101
K16	Consultant	Web design	100
K17	Founder & CEO	Mobile Technology	74
K18	Regional manager & angle investor	Technology	77
K19	Founder & CEO	E-commerce	80
K20	Founder & CEO	Entertainment	87
K21	Founder & CEO	Financial Technology	69
K22	Founder & CEO, Investment manager	Technology	70
K23	Founder & CEO	E-commerce	43
K24	Consultant	Web design	111
K25	Investment manager	Equity Finance	53
K26	Founder & CEO, angle investor	Fast-moving consumer goods	42
<b>Total:</b>			<b><u>1.889</u> minutes</b>
<b>Expatriate Interviewees</b>			
<b>ID</b>	<b>Official work title</b>	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Time</b>
E1	Founder & various other roles	Financial Technology	26
E2	Investment manager, founder & CEO	Equity Finance	56
E3	Regional manager, founder & CEO	various	61
E4	Founder & various other roles	Financial Technology	54
E5	Consultant	Management consulting	61
E6	Investment manager	Equity Finance	64
E7	Investment manager, founder & CEO	Equity Finance	60
<b>Total:</b>			<b><u>382</u> minutes</b>

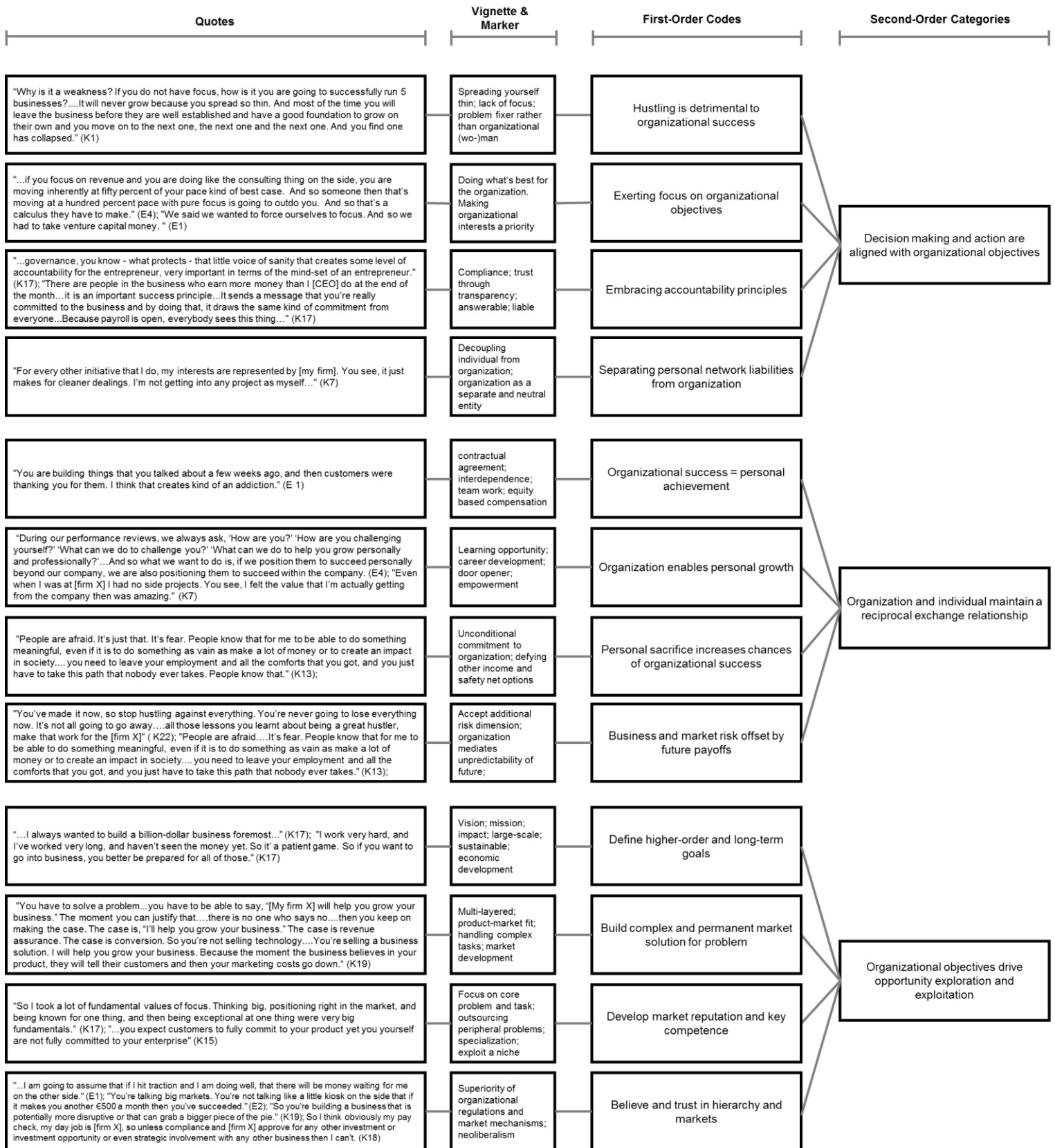
## 6.2. Appendix IV: Work portfolio dimensions

### IV-A: Hustling Dimension

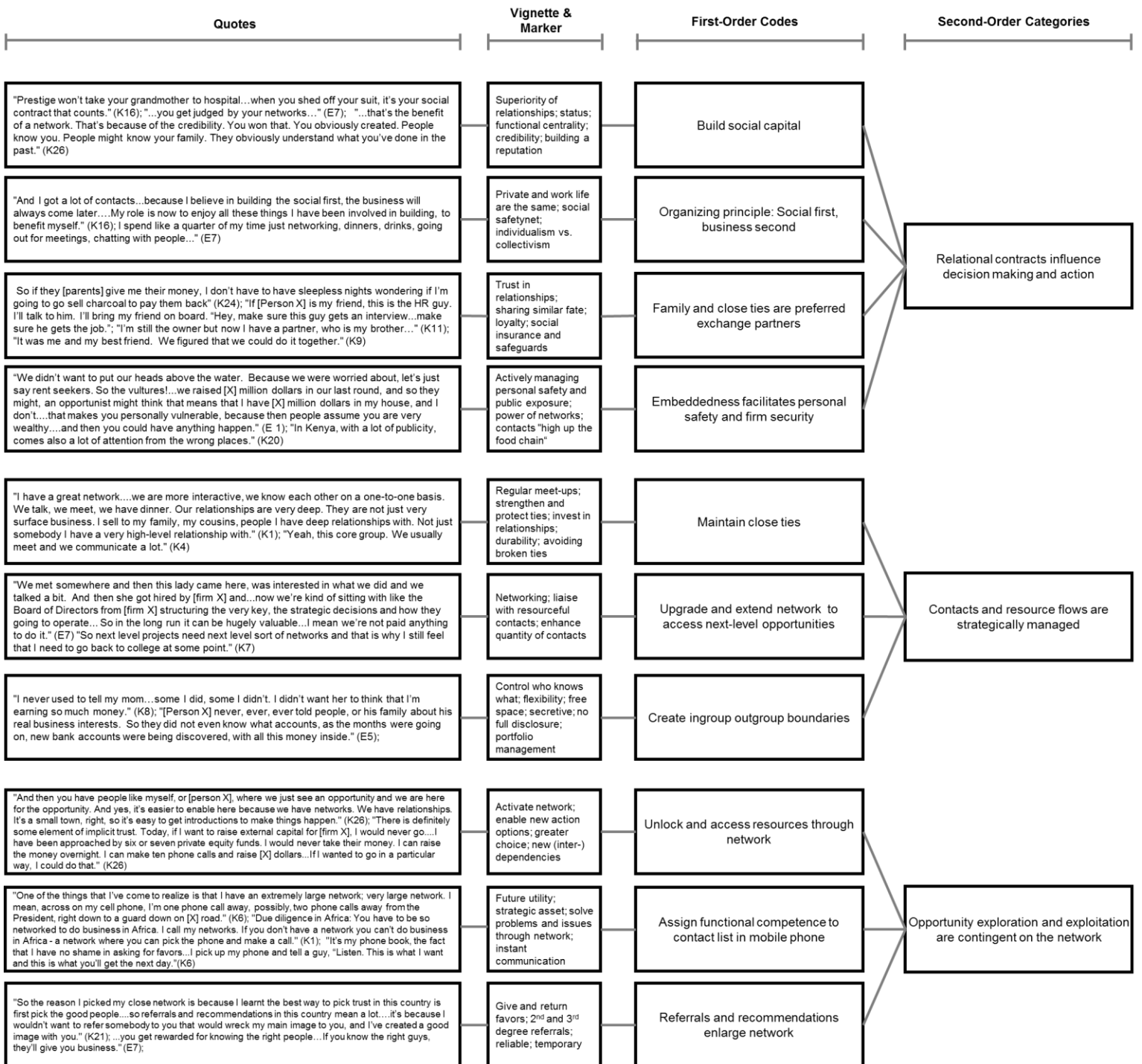
Quotes	Vignette & Marker	First-Order Codes	Second-Order Categories
"Honestly, there is no sense of tenure....People are worried that they will be fired at any time." (K6); "Scarcity mentality: everybody kind of feels like it's a very limited pool from which to draw" (K6); "How are you supposed to focus when your landlord is about to kick you out?" (K13); "It comes up in, you've began this business, it's working or you're probably employed somewhere. You don't know how long you're going to stay in that company or employed there so you try to find something that will make you money in case you get fired." (K23);	Survival; absence of social welfare; unpredictable and uncertain future; unstable labor market	Existential fear motivates action	Individual motives drive decision making and action
"It is almost weird if you do not do it? It is almost like you must be lazy or what do you mean you do not do anything besides working? There is nothing else you do? It is almost like you got to be serious. It is a cultural thing and you wouldn't understand unless you are born here. My parents do it, my auntie, my grandparents do it. It is what you have been brought up to....If you are born and bred here then it doesn't leave you. It doesn't matter, if you go out there and come back. It is in your DNA. You just come back and re-adjust to the cultural issues...you can try to fight it. When you live here it is easier to become a part of it then to fight it. ..." (K1)	Hustling is the norm; constant reproduction of behavior; fear and resistance to change	Intersubjective expectations and network prompt hustling	
"If given a choice between a slightly easier path, not so legal way, of a secondary flow of income, I think a lot of people would gravitate towards that." (K21); "...I'm about to get married...Oh my gosh, I need a whole lot more money. I can't just be happy with some 50,000 Ksh, you know? So I started really, really risking a lot more in my trades." (K9); "...he called me and told me, "Listen, the people that are involved in this, just leave it! Those are the two options. You'll either be dead, if you follow it, or you will end up dead, if you follow it." (K6)	High risk action; borderline legal; illegitimate and illegal activity; working around legal barriers	Precariousness of income situation determines risk tolerance	
There's a lot of fear, less trust. People are actually afraid to reveal what they are doing for all sorts of reason." (K6); "So invest in me, and it's between me and you." (K20); "...was untraceable. We didn't pay taxes. We didn't do anything. In this case means "under the radar." (K6); "And the cost is malicious actors, trying to come in and have a piece of it. And malicious actors can be really, really malicious here." (E4); "...just never talk about how much you are making" (K20)	Operating under the radar; mistrust; corruption; never put on display what you have	External accountability adversely affects income situation	
"I started building mobile apps on the side for people... I'd go to work. I'd work for some time and then I'd close my computer and remove my other computer and just code the rest of the day." (K8); "Somebody just calls me up. I actually did so many side hustles [while being employed]." (K8); "[Entrepreneurs] are incentivized to get easily accessible capital and live off of it. So it's created a subculture of entrepreneurs who participate in competitions and go after grant, after grant, after grant, without actually working to build a sustainable business." (K15)	Employment; contingent work; self-employed; sub-contracting; entrepreneurial work; compepreneur;	Different forms of work are pragmatic means to income generation	Permanently seeking new income opportunities
"...here we are welfare first, productivity second. We believe a business is a welfare system." (K16); "...why don't I also start to getting these jobs on the side. And that's how I started my first start-up." (K14); "I look at, "Can I get this business to pay me?" That's when I know I'm creating value." (K6); "If I break my finger, the work will not be done tomorrow, or if I have a strain injury. But now it's a company, you have many developers working on something." (K10)	Firm as social insurance; firm profit = personal profit; individual and firm are one	Organization creation is a pragmatic means to income generation	
"Kenyans are inherently entrepreneurial." (K6); "It doesn't matter where somebody is in life. They are constantly trying...my dad retired, spent a year, went and started a hotel...We trade. We are buying and selling things. We are constantly chasing the next dollar. It's an inherently Kenyan thing...So everybody is trying to make a buck, and I guess, so am I." (K6); "A lot of people don't use frameworks here to decide how to enter a venture. They just hear that something's hot....and they just jump in." (E5)	Notoriously spotting opportunities; always on the hustle	New income opportunities are seized instantly	
"I think we put in about 300,000 Kenyan shillings, and they wrote me a check for 900K, three times in about a week..." (K6); "His other hustle is, if you need something, let him know. He could get you a connection." (K21); "Kenyans, we resell stuff." (K9); "...almost everybody's trying to cut a deal, because Kenyans tend to be very deal-driven" (K6);	Brokering deals; fast cash; quick fixes to problems and market inefficiencies	Deals with immediate payoff are preferred	
"Let me tell you something. Maybe it will come as a bit of a shocker. I'm working on my fourth start-up." (K13); "We have all these things on the side, I am a director in, is it twelve companies or something like that, so I mean I do act out my entrepreneurial self in those companies." (E3); "I was doing that on the side and I started making some money. So it reached a point where the money I was making in a month was close to my salary." (K9)	Supplementing income; balancing out income gaps; polychronicity	Income opportunities are seized simultaneously	Seizing multiple opportunities concurrently
"I have been out there [out of Kenya] for most of my life but I do farming on the side. Not because I need the money per se but it is almost innate that you are always doing something else." (K1); "...they have a company that has three portions, right - real estate, agriculture and education. And it sounds like a conglomerate but it really isn't..." (E5); "My peers. Agriculture is the easiest. They are like, "Yeah, I'm doing something like a chicken farm, in the middle of nowhere. So if you hear anybody looking for about 200 or 300 chickens or quails, let me know... Then you've got the upper class hustle, which is usually, like a day job working as a government [employee]" (K21)	Pluriactivity; diversification; eclectic work; portfolio career	Income opportunities are seized across industry sectors	
"Yes, I [entrepreneurs] want to grow. And I want to be big and successful. But the way they would do that is I want many businesses. I want to have eight businesses. I want to have a matatu. I want to have a pub. I want to have a trading company. I want to sell vitamin. I want to do this little project here, that little project there, that is their definition of success." (E3); "This is what characterizes a hustler: the number of businesses I have in my buzz..." (K2); people want to get wealthy, and they really, really want to get wealthy, and so salaries won't take you there, so they think they will own businesses on the side." (K6)	Patchworking; no divestment; individualized conglomerate	Wealth accumulation needs diversified income portfolio	
"...you de-risk yourself by having multi-streams of income even though they are each a little bit. At least you won't die. You're not going to lose everything. You are going to lose two. You might lose one; you might lose two of those things but the third stream will keep coming. You have enough money to buy food for your families." (K22); "I saw family, friends, in very high positions, earning 1 million, 1.2 million Ksh a month, and the guy tells you, "Yeah, I've got a side hustle." And I'm like, "Why do you need a side hustle?... "No, no. You never know. One day, you'll never know. Things could just go bad, so I need to..." (K21);	Hedge your bets; don't put all your eggs in one basket; insulate from external shocks; stability	Diversified portfolio buffers from environmental uncertainty	



## IV-B: Organizational Work Dimension



## IV-C: Relational Work Dimension



## IV-D: Personal Finance Activities Dimension

