



 <p>Journal of Management and Business Innovation (JOMBINOV)  <a href="https://v-learnov.com/index.php/jombinov">https://v-learnov.com/index.php/jombinov</a>          Volume 02          Number 01          Month 2026          Page: 46 – 63          ISSN: 3123-6464 (Online)</p>	<h3>Interpreting Entrepreneurial Transitions Through the Narratives of Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (ESO): A Study in Solo, Central Java</h3> <p>Edy Tri Atmojo<sup>1*</sup>, Kartika Wulandari<sup>2</sup>, Bagus Yudistira<sup>3</sup>, Sry Setyaningrum<sup>4</sup></p> <p><sup>1,2</sup>. Department of Management, Wijaya Mulya College of Economics, Indonesia  <sup>3,4</sup>. Department of Management, University of Surakarta, Indonesia</p>
<p><b>Article History:</b>          Received: 13 Jan 2026          Revised: 29 Jan 2026          Accepted: 04 Feb 2026</p> <p><b>Corresponding Author:</b>          Edy Tri Admojo</p> <p><b>Corresponding E-mail:</b>  <a href="mailto:triadmojoedy@gmail.com">triadmojoedy@gmail.com</a></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Abstract</b></p> <p><b>Research Aims:</b>          This study aims to examine how Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (ESOs) construct and disseminate narratives that shape entrepreneurial transitions among Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Solo, Central Java, particularly in the context of digital transformation and ecosystem development.</p> <p><b>Methodology:</b>          The research employs a qualitative multiple-case study approach, drawing on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving MSME actors and two key ESOs. Data were analyzed using thematic and narrative analysis to capture patterns of identity construction, ecosystem orientation, and future-oriented sensemaking.</p> <p><b>Theoretical Contribution/Originality:</b>          This study contributes to the transitional entrepreneurship literature by foregrounding narratives as a central mechanism through which ESOs shape entrepreneurial identities, ecosystem positioning, and collective futures, extending ecosystem-based perspectives beyond instrumental support functions.</p> <p><b>Practitioners/Policy Implications:</b>          Findings highlight the strategic role of ESOs in fostering digital literacy, collaboration, and inclusive ecosystem development, offering insights for policymakers and practitioners to design more narrative-sensitive and equity-oriented support programs.</p> <p><b>Research Limitations/Implications:</b>          The study is limited to two ESOs within a single local context, suggesting opportunities for future research across diverse regions and broader ecosystem actors using comparative or discourse-based approaches.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Entrepreneurial Support Organizations, Transitional Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, MSMEs, Digital Transformation, Narrative Analysis, Solo-Central Java</p>
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## INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has long been recognized as a primary driver of economic growth and innovation, with entrepreneurs playing a pivotal role as individuals who are adept at identifying and evaluating business opportunities, allocating resources effectively, and transforming innovative ideas into financial success (Livandy & Nuringsih, 2022). This vital role is further

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reinforced by their capacity to undertake calculated risks, which is essential for stimulating economic progress and creating added value within society (Nizar, 2017). The urgency of entrepreneurship has become increasingly pronounced in the contemporary context, where innovation and adaptability constitute the core determinants of survival in a highly competitive economic environment (Prasetyo, 2020).

Furthermore, entrepreneurship is widely regarded as a strategic vehicle for sustainable economic development, contributing substantially to global economic advancement through job creation and income generation (Khamimah, 2021). In Indonesia, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) constitute the backbone of the national economy, making significant contributions to the Gross Domestic Product and providing employment for millions of people (Andy & Widiono, 2024; Mustikowati & Tysari, 2015).

Because entrepreneurs do not operate in a vacuum but instead depend on an underlying system of actors and programs, understanding the role played by Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (ESOs) within the broader ecosystem is critically important. This paper examines the role of ESOs in shaping the social realities of transitional entrepreneurs, with particular attention to the narratives adopted by ESOs within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Specifically, we employ a multiple case study approach (Stake, 2005), investigating two prominent ESOs that respectively target environmentally oriented entrepreneurs and technology-sector entrepreneurs in Detroit, Michigan. We argue that the narratives adopted by these ESOs are highly consequential, as they communicate perceived pathways to success for transitional entrepreneurs and have the potential to shape their identities and actions (Roundy, 2016; Roundy & Bayer, 2019).

In the digital era, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) face both new challenges and emerging opportunities, as digital technologies and e-commerce provide alternative pathways for business growth, while entrepreneurial orientation has become a critical determinant of entrepreneurial success (Zulkifli et al., 2023). This phenomenon underscores the need for in-depth studies examining how local-level entrepreneurial support organizations, such as those operating in Solo, Central Java, assist MSMEs in navigating this transition and leveraging digital opportunities to achieve sustainable growth (Zulkifli et al., 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively examine the narratives of entrepreneurial transition experienced by MSMEs in Solo, Central Java, particularly in relation to their adaptation to digitalization and the role of entrepreneurial support organizations in facilitating this process (FH et al., 2023; Kevin & Puspitowati, 2020). Accordingly, focusing on the interpretation of entrepreneurial transitions through the narratives of support organizations becomes crucial for understanding the dynamics of adaptation and innovation amid rapidly changing business landscapes (Asikin & Fadilah, 2024).

This study specifically explores how entrepreneurial functions—encompassing risk-bearing capacity, the innovative combination of resources, and value creation—are manifested in MSMEs' adaptive strategies in response to globalization and digitalization, as articulated through the perspectives of entrepreneurial support organizations (Nisa, 2016; Rijali & Rusdianto, 2025). In addition, the research investigates how e-commerce serves as a critical instrument for MSMEs to expand market reach and enhance operational efficiency in the era of Society 5.0, as well as the digitalization-related challenges they encounter and the strategies employed by support organizations to address these challenges (Ardani, 2022; Rijali & Rusdianto, 2025).

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This study examines the strategic role of entrepreneurial support organizations in strengthening entrepreneurial characteristics among MSMEs in Solo, particularly in enhancing digital literacy, technological adaptation, product innovation, and managerial capacity development in the era of the Industrial Revolution 5.0, where advanced technologies and artificial intelligence are increasingly integrated across various business functions (Fatimatuzzahro et al., 2024).

Digital transformation in the MSME sector not only reshapes operational practices but also enhances competitiveness through the adoption of digital technologies and e-commerce (Dahniar et al., 2025). This study further analyzes how heightened turbulence and limited access conditions, which have often been perceived as constraints, paradoxically create new opportunities for MSME development amid challenging environments, as well as how firms within advanced economic sectors emerge as critical corridors within the broader system driving national progress, despite having previously faced structural limitations (Asikin & Fadilah, 2024).

Therefore, this study provides an in-depth examination of business modernization efforts in the digital era and the integral role of information technology in organizational operations, including integrated sales and inventory systems that enable real-time stock monitoring (Da Gonza & Fernandes Andry, 2025). This approach aligns with the need for MSMEs to adopt digital platforms in order to strengthen competitiveness and effectively respond to the challenges posed by digitalization and the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Widyaningsih et al., 2023).

This digital transformation requires MSMEs to develop well-structured strategies, engage all relevant stakeholders, and invest in both technological infrastructure and workforce skill development in order to survive and achieve sustainable growth (Fa'ah & Aman, 2025). Digital innovation strategies—such as the adoption of e-commerce and data-driven decision-making—have been shown to enhance MSMEs' competitiveness, revenue growth, and operational efficiency within a dynamic economic landscape (Kamuri et al., 2023). The implementation of e-commerce and broader digital innovations is therefore crucial for MSME empowerment, enabling firms to expand market reach and strengthen competitiveness through the optimal utilization of technology (Kamuri et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, MSMEs continue to face various constraints, including limited digital literacy and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder the comprehensive adoption of technology and e-commerce (Angraini et al., 2024). Consequently, the role of entrepreneurial support organizations becomes essential in bridging these gaps through training and mentoring programs, particularly in the implementation of artificial intelligence, which opens opportunities for MSMEs to engage in broader sectors such as smart manufacturing and digital agriculture (Mardiana et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this study elaborates on how information technology assists MSMEs in overcoming operational inefficiencies and optimizing sales management through web-based Point of Sale systems (Andy & Widiono, 2024). Accordingly, the research examines how digital innovation strategies implemented by MSMEs—including the development of an online presence and the utilization of e-commerce platforms—contribute to enhanced competitiveness and business growth amid increasingly intense market competition (Triwijayati et al., 2023).

This study seeks to address key questions concerning how MSMEs in the city of Solo interpret entrepreneurial transitions within the context of digitalization, as well as the specific roles played by entrepreneurial support organizations in facilitating processes of adaptation and

innovation. Specifically, the study highlights how digital technologies function not only as tools for marketing and business growth, but also as drivers of efficient decision-making and enhanced competitive advantage for MSMEs in Solo. This includes an exploration of how MSMEs utilize digital platforms to optimize their online presence, the strategies they employ, and the challenges they encounter throughout the digitalization process. Furthermore, the study identifies key factors influencing the success of MSMEs in Solo in leveraging digital technologies and e-commerce platforms to expand market reach and improve operational efficiency.

## METHODS

### Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach using a descriptive case study method, focusing on an in-depth analysis of narratives from MSME actors and entrepreneurial support organizations in the city of Solo. This approach enables the researcher to capture subjective experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of MSMEs within the digital landscape, as well as to conduct a deep exploration of complex phenomena (Triwijayati et al., 2023).

The approach also allows for a more nuanced examination of contextual conditions and interactions among actors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Rahman Aripin, 2025). A qualitative approach, particularly case study research, is highly relevant for investigating entrepreneurial transitions, as it facilitates the identification and analysis of adaptation and innovation patterns in response to the challenges of the digital era (Setiawati et al., 2024).

The use of a descriptive case study is considered appropriate for illustrating and interpreting how MSMEs adapt to change and how support organizations play a crucial role in driving digital transformation (Rijali & Rusdianto, 2025; Wilestari et al., 2023).

### Data Collection

Data will be collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the research subjects. In-depth interviews will be conducted with MSME owners who are actively adopting digital technologies, as well as with representatives of entrepreneurial support organizations involved in digitalization programs (Alam et al., 2023; Machin et al., 2023).

Participant observation will be employed to directly examine the implementation of digital technologies and MSMEs' digital business practices, while document analysis will include program reports, training materials, and policies related to MSME digitalization issued by support organizations (Akhmad & Purnomo, 2021).

### Data Credibility

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, data triangulation will be conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis (Nurhayati, 2025). This triangulation aims to verify the consistency of data across multiple sources, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings (Po Abas Sunarya et al., 2025). The process of establishing data credibility will also involve source and methodological triangulation, which serves to compare information derived from different participants and data collection techniques in order to ensure the soundness of interpretations (Fitria & Nawangsih, 2023; Syafi'i et al., 2023). This approach is essential to ensure that the conclusions drawn are not based on a single perspective or method, but instead reflect a comprehensive and rigorously validated understanding of the

phenomenon under study (Pamungkas et al., 2024).

In addition, member checking will be conducted by soliciting feedback from research participants on the results of the data analysis to ensure that the researcher's interpretations are aligned with their lived experiences (Perdana et al., 2024). Research validity will further be maintained through the selection of credible and relevant sources (Putra et al., 2025; Wati & Rajuddin, 2025). The application of multiple validation techniques, including source and methodological triangulation, will strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings by cross-examining data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation (Sari et al., 2025).

### Data Analysis

The collected data will subsequently be analyzed using a descriptive qualitative analysis method, through which the researcher will identify patterns, themes, and categories emerging from participants' narratives to develop in-depth interpretations (Mardiana et al., 2024). This analytical process involves organizing and clustering relevant information into specific categories – such as development speed, ease of integration, and application performance – in order to identify the advantages and challenges encountered (Sinlae et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the data will be examined to identify how each of these components influences the overall digital entrepreneurial ecosystem in Solo (Hasibuan, 2018). This stage entails data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the findings (Sara & Fitryani, 2020).

Thematic analysis will be employed to uncover salient patterns within interview data that cannot be captured through quantitative approaches (Indah et al., 2025; Po Abas Sunarya et al., 2025). This step also explores the relationships among emergent variables derived from the narratives and links the findings to relevant theoretical frameworks in order to deepen understanding of entrepreneurial transitions (Po Abas Sunarya et al., 2025).

This analytical technique also takes into account the local context of Solo to highlight the specific dynamics shaping MSME entrepreneurial trajectories and the role of support organizations (Perdana et al., 2023). Such an approach is well suited for capturing lived experiences, perceptions, and contextual nuances that influence how startup firms strategically utilize technology (Fachrurazi et al., 2023).

For this study, we selected RegionalESO and TechESO as two case studies because, although they share several resources and pursue a common objective of fostering the maturation of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, they differ in important ways in terms of scope and target audiences (Table 1). RegionalESO focuses on promoting entrepreneurship among members of the local community, particularly underserved populations, whereas TechESO is oriented toward the development of high-growth entrepreneurship, especially within the technology sector. Importantly, both RegionalESO and TechESO differ from the five main categories of entrepreneurial support organizations (ESOs) that have traditionally been the focus of entrepreneurship research – namely incubators, science parks, accelerators, maker spaces, and coworking spaces (Bergman & McMullen, 2022). Although this manuscript centers on their activities during the 2022–2025 period, the data analyzed are part of a broader ethnographic study of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the city of Solo, and throughout the fieldwork we engaged with key actors occupying a variety of roles within the ecosystem.

Accordingly, for both cases, we analyzed institutional discourses directed at key stakeholders, discourses co-constructed with or produced for subsets of these stakeholders, as well as interviews with key actors within each ESO. This diverse corpus of data not only enables us to understand how these ESOs construct and represent the entrepreneurial ecosystem, but also allows us to trace the narrative logics that guide these constructions.

**Table 1. Key Differences Between Regional ESO and Tech ESO**

Variable	Regional ESO	Tech ESO
Origins	Inisiatif pengembangan kewirausahaan yang dipimpin oleh filantropi, dibentuk pada tahun 2007; saat ini bernaung dalam satu organisasi, namun pada awal pendiriannya dibentuk melalui kolaborasi antarorganisasi di tingkat regional.	Formed in 2018 as a standalone nonprofit, by a single founder, to generate research on entrepreneurial ecosystems
Regional Focus Mission	SE Michigan with strong Detroit focus Socioeconomic empowerment and community development for the region; entrepreneurship is one of the ways to accomplish this mission	US Midwest with strong SE Michigan focus Grow entrepreneurship in the state of Michigan, and particularly attract venture capital and angel investors nationwide to hi-growth opportunities and entrepreneurs in the region
Scope of Activities	Makes grants to other ESOs and partner organizations, makes grants directly to entrepreneurs, offers programming for entrepreneurs, offers technical training to partner organizations	Conducts research, develops data-drive programming for ESOs and partner organizations
Support to Entrepreneurs	Direct and indirect	indirect

Source: Lucas and Mitra (2023)

## RESULT

### Constructing Entrepreneurial Identity

In constructing identities for entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial support organizations (ESOs) establish definitional boundaries while simultaneously seeking to inspire prospective entrepreneurs. The delineation of these boundaries plays a crucial role in enabling individuals from diverse segments of the Solo community to see themselves as part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, even though, at the same time, such boundaries may occasionally reify traditional meanings of entrepreneurship. As articulated by the CEO of Regional ESO, *“many people in residential communities do not see themselves represented in the images we have traditionally presented when we talk about*

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*entrepreneurs.*” Consequently, he further noted that RegionalESO has “worked very hard to intentionally change that narrative.”

Firm size frequently emerges as a recurring issue, with RegionalESO, together with its partners, describing entrepreneurship as an activity that encompasses small and micro enterprises as well as family-owned businesses. In addition, the boundaries of entrepreneurship are expanded to include actors operating in the informal sector, which is particularly relevant for low-income immigrants. Most residents of the city of Solo perceive entrepreneurs as individuals who are self-employed or who run family businesses or franchise ventures, and more than 40% identify themselves as entrepreneurs. In other words, these ESOs seek to integrate vernacular understandings of entrepreneurship – especially those prevalent among low-income, vulnerable, and marginalized communities – into the policy reports they produce.

Nevertheless, there are limitations to the rhetoric of expanding definitional boundaries, which is primarily adopted by RegionalESO and its partners and is more strongly oriented toward “*everyday entrepreneurs*” (Welter et al., 2017). In contrast, TechESO defines entrepreneurship within the framework of high-technology, high-growth, and formally structured ventures that do not permit operation in the informal sector. Despite this emphasis, TechESO continues to stress the importance of ensuring that prospective Black entrepreneurs and other minority groups gain access to relevant networks and resources.

The narratives developed by both RegionalESO and TechESO seek to inspire prospective and early-stage entrepreneurs by highlighting stories of entrepreneurial resilience, showcasing accounts of success, and emphasizing the importance of solidarity – underscoring the notion that entrepreneurs are “*people like me.*”

Stories of resilience are most frequently employed by RegionalESO to position local entrepreneurs as steadfast and persistent actors in the face of multiple crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, RegionalESO highlights the case of a community resident who established a children’s play center, *Kidz Kingdom*, within her neighborhood because the nearest indoor playground for her son (and other children with similar needs) was located in a suburban area and was not accessible on foot. After launching the venture, she successfully navigated the restrictions imposed during the pandemic as well as disputes with the property owner, ultimately securing financial support and obtaining loan and rent relief.

Interestingly, this group of unicorns also includes several transitional entrepreneurs, such as founders of on-demand cleaning services, who are noted for the way their steadily increasing success has brought them public recognition. The founder of one such venture spent his adolescence working as a cleaning service worker. Subsequently, he acquired the technical aspects of managing his business through another entrepreneurial support organization, whose client base largely consists of large companies in the city of Solo. Meanwhile, TechESO also presents stories of spectacular entrepreneurial success that align with what is often referred to as the “unicorn” myth – namely, startups that achieve exceptional success and exhibit high levels of scalability (Kuckertz et al., 2023).

For example, TechESO highlights live-stream online marketers of luxury fashion products who have successfully secured capital funding. These examples further underscore the theme of how ESOs transmit learning to entrepreneurs, particularly through training initiatives and by encouraging them to disseminate their knowledge and experiences to others.

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## **Orienting to the Ecosystem**

The second way in which ESO narratives shape transitional entrepreneurship in the city of Solo is by helping to orient entrepreneurs within the entrepreneurial ecosystem (that is, addressing the question of “*where do we stand?*”), through the identification of significant temporal shifts, the tracing of interconnections among ecosystem components, and the transmission of key lessons to entrepreneurs.

The narratives developed by ESOs identify various temporal shifts within the entrepreneurial ecosystem by highlighting the history of access to expertise in the region, longstanding limitations in entrepreneurial infrastructure for marginalized groups, historical shortages of venture capital, and the more recent inflow of such capital. Reflecting the multiple barriers faced by this still-emerging ecosystem, only two of these temporal trends are regarded as having positively influenced entrepreneurial success—namely, access to expertise and the recent entry of capital. Despite a long history of intellectual and social capital, prolonged deficiencies in financial capital have constrained many startups in earlier periods.

Nevertheless, the recent influx of venture capital suggests that these historical trends are open to change. In its report, VencapESO notes that 76 startups received venture capital investment in 2023; this figure represents a 19% increase compared to five years earlier in the number of startups in Solo that attracted venture funding. While TechESO’s narrative focuses on issues of expertise, the scarcity of venture capital, and investment dynamics, the narrative developed by RegionalESO instead highlights the historical absence of entrepreneurial infrastructure for marginalized groups—a condition that has directly affected transitional entrepreneurs.

Transitional entrepreneurs from marginalized backgrounds and underserved environments face not only limited networks and restricted access to capital when building their ventures, but these conditions also often result in weak marketing and operational strategies that are essential for business sustainability. As noted by RegionalESO (2023), “*without sufficient capital to hire top-tier public relations firms or without literacy regarding the outcomes that effective marketing strategies can generate, businesses owned by Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and queer communities face a higher probability of failure.*” Such reports help transitional entrepreneurs recognize the gaps they face in professional development while simultaneously directing them toward resources that can be leveraged to address these gaps at relatively low cost.

## **Tracing Ecosystem Interconnections**

The narratives developed by ESOs trace the interconnections among components within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, enabling entrepreneurs to gain a clearer understanding of their position. This is achieved by emphasizing a spirit of collaboration among ecosystem actors and highlighting the crucial role of entrepreneurs in the process of revitalizing the communities in which they operate.

The spirit of collaboration emerges as an *in vivo* code across multiple findings, particularly in contexts where RegionalESO emphasizes that actors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem achieve optimal effectiveness when working collectively. In describing a Fellowship program for a subset of its grant recipients, RegionalESO states, “*RegionalESO partnered with (Media) to publish a series of stories celebrating the 2021–2024 cohort of fellowship participants, along with a special report on the program. These stories highlight the spirit of collaboration and camaraderie among participants, as well as how they sustained their projects during the COVID-19 pandemic*”



Earlier in the same report, the ESO also notes, *“We were impressed by the diverse ways in which our network, together with funders and colleagues, collaborated quickly and resiliently to provide vital support through grants.”* The report emphasizes that many ESOs themselves emerged from challenging socio-economic conditions, instilling a belief in the importance of uniting to provide a certain level of support to others during times of crisis.

This spirit of collaboration is not limited to RegionalESO alone; it also underscores that collaboration among diverse actors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem constitutes a key strength, even as startups face a range of structural and operational barriers.

The narratives developed by ESOs also position entrepreneurs as key actors in efforts to revitalize underserved communities, particularly through spillover effects such as job creation and wealth generation among marginalized groups. RegionalESO emphasizes that the organization *“has continuously re-evaluated its strategies, recognizing the role played by main street entrepreneurs and social enterprises in supporting a strong economy.”* In its report, RegionalESO further highlights *“the importance of environmentally oriented small businesses for the stabilization and revitalization of commercial corridors in Solo.”*

Moreover, it is stated that *“small businesses and entrepreneurs are the primary drivers of job creation and economic growth. Providing inclusive access to capital, support, and resources for underserved small businesses can transform the developmental trajectory of struggling areas, build wealth among entrepreneurs of color and women, and enhance overall economic performance.”* Transitional entrepreneurs are viewed as playing a crucial role in breaking intergenerational cycles of unemployment and poverty within low-income minority communities, given historical limitations in infrastructure and the failure of mainstream governance to meet the needs of these groups.

While this theme is most prominent in RegionalESO’s narrative, TechESO also acknowledges the vital role of entrepreneurs within the broader socio-economic ecosystem. Its report notes that approximately 10% of scaling ventures generate more than 74% of jobs.

### **Transmitting Lessons**

The narratives developed by ESOs illustrate how key lessons are transmitted to prospective entrepreneurs within the ecosystem, particularly through efforts to connect entrepreneurs with other actors in the ecosystem, provide training to enable them to deliver effective pitches, and encourage them to relay knowledge and support to others.

Both ESOs emphasize their roles as connectors and conveners in supporting transitional entrepreneurs, particularly given the historical absence of entrepreneurial infrastructure for marginalized groups, which has resulted in significant network gaps. For RegionalESO, linking transitional entrepreneurs to resources and influential actors within the ecosystem is a critically important strategy. The organization states, *“Now more than ever, RegionalESO is committed to connecting small businesses and prospective entrepreneurs with individuals and resources that can support their growth and goal attainment, especially as existing small businesses led by people of color, immigrants, and women are disproportionately disconnected from access to capital, resources, and strategic social networks that can provide equitable opportunities to launch, develop, and sustain their ventures.”*

Similarly, for TechESO, building and maintaining a resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem requires efforts to bridge connections between local organizations and the entrepreneurial community, while encouraging individuals to recommend diverse talent for job opportunities, speaking forums, and networking activities.



One of the key lessons transmitted to entrepreneurs is training on how to pitch their small business ideas to influential stakeholders, after first being connected through ESO networks. This pitch training is particularly crucial for transitional entrepreneurs, who often lack prestigious educational backgrounds typically valued by venture capitalists or have yet to master the “language” used in the funding world. As expressed by a representative of TechESO: *“Ensuring that these individuals are connected to the network so that they can meet someone, or at least have the opportunity to meet someone who knows someone else; and then ensuring that when they finally encounter a person with such access, they are fully prepared to present their company or able to articulate the value they offer in order to gain access to various opportunities.”*

They emphasize that the primary weakness of transitional entrepreneurs from marginalized communities does not lie in the viability of their business projects, but rather in their ability to articulate the value they offer. The final mechanism employed by ESOs to transmit key lessons to entrepreneurs is by encouraging them to (pay it forward) to other prospective entrepreneurs or early-stage founders. This approach reinforces the interconnectedness of actors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem by strengthening the spirit of collaboration discussed earlier. In various reports, stories of entrepreneurial success are consistently paired with anecdotes about individuals who support other founders.

For example, TechESO (2023) notes that, *“When successful entrepreneurs support early-stage founders, the probability of success for those ventures increases. Influential stakeholders need to build networks to help founders share knowledge, social connections, and financial capital.”* Thus, through the practice of paying it forward, entrepreneurs not only assist others—particularly those from marginalized backgrounds—in achieving their entrepreneurial goals, but also contribute to the dissemination of knowledge across the ecosystem, thereby enhancing its overall resilience.

### **Envisioning A Collective Future**

Ultimately, the narratives developed by ESOs help articulate a collective vision for the future of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and transitional entrepreneurs (what are we going to do?), encompassing three main subthemes: accelerating investment, supporting diversity and inclusion, and building a healthy ecosystem.

While acknowledging that recent years have seen an increase in the availability of capital and other resources for entrepreneurs, ESOs emphasize that realizing a collective vision of shared prosperity requires a far greater effort to accelerate the pace of investment. One strategy to advance this objective is to frame the stories of transitional entrepreneurs as unfinished narratives, thereby underscoring the need for larger infusions of capital to enable them to fully realize their potential.

Furthermore, by highlighting the “conservative nature” of venture capital investors as a key barrier to the sustained growth of local entrepreneurs, TechESO argues that this condition generates significant tensions between entrepreneurs and investors. As noted in its report, *“there is a widening relational gap in which entrepreneurs feel undervalued by local investors, even though their products or business models are often more readily funded by investors from outside the region.”* Nevertheless, this challenge cannot be attributed solely to the investor community, as expanding access to capital for entrepreneurs constitutes a collective responsibility shared among multiple stakeholders. Such efforts include strengthening the fundraising capacity of venture capital firms, increasing state-level investment in venture capital institutions, and enhancing government support for programs that directly channel investment to startup ventures.

### Support DEI

ESO narratives also envision a collective future for the entrepreneurial ecosystem that actively supports initiatives related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). A central element of this vision is the expansion of opportunities for entrepreneurs from marginalized groups. TechESO 2024 notes that the startup and venture capital community is composed of approximately 45% individuals originating from outside the city. To sustain diversity in Solo City, local leaders must ensure that long-standing residents gain equitable access to the funding and economic opportunities generated by the growth of the high-technology economy.

Thus, ESOs envision a future entrepreneurial ecosystem characterized by greater parity between the proportion of long-term local residents and the number of migrant entrepreneurs. This vision is advanced through the strengthening of programs that explicitly prioritize support for entrepreneurs native to the City of Solo. Organizational leaders emphasize that the development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem must be pursued inclusively, such that access to newly created resources is not confined to already established communities, dominant majority groups, or long-standing networks.

Furthermore, the leader argues that *“entry barriers faced by local entrepreneurs – particularly within the technology sector – must be addressed in a systematic manner. According to this perspective, relatively few organizations currently provide accessible and clearly defined pathways for individuals to enter the entrepreneurial community, as existing networks remain highly fragmented and segmented – across educational attainment, between migrant and local entrepreneurs, and along gender lines. The leader underscores that only a limited number of organizations are actively focused on bridging these structural divisions to create inclusive access points into the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and it is within this gap that TechESO strategically positions its role”*.

Another key element of the DEI-oriented vision for the future of the entrepreneurial ecosystem is the empowerment of community development in underserved neighborhoods. For RegionalESO, this objective is grounded in what the organization describes as its core value of inclusion. It emphasizes that while innovation-led initiatives are undoubtedly important – and discussions surrounding how to ensure inclusivity within such spaces are relevant – these efforts remain insufficient for communities that continue to face persistently high levels of unemployment and low educational attainment.

An awareness of the challenges and opportunities shaped by Solo’s social and political history has served as a turning point for ESOs in designing equity-minded programs for transitional entrepreneurs, while simultaneously encouraging ecosystem partners to adopt similar approaches. RegionalESO articulates its forward-looking vision as one in which *“small businesses in underserved areas are supported by strong, inclusive, and interconnected support networks, enabling local economies and surrounding communities to grow and thrive.”* In a similar vein, CityESO calls for targeted interventions across multiple points within the system that can be sharpened and refined to foster more inclusive development, while ensuring that entrepreneurial and small business resources are directed toward addressing the financial challenges faced by communities in the City of Solo.

### Healthy Ecosystem

The future vision articulated by ESOs also rests on the creation of a healthy entrepreneurial ecosystem, characterized by strong regional collaboration and the capacity for self-sustainability.



Both RegionalESO and TechESO emphasize the importance of more cohesive regional collaboration. By way of illustration, the CEO of TechESO argues that the emergence of a vibrant City of Solo would generate significant positive effects for the entrepreneurial community, particularly in terms of talent attraction.

According to this perspective, vitality in Solo would not only benefit the city itself but would also produce spillover effects for surrounding areas such as Surakarta and Klaten. He underscores that *“the ability to attract conferences, stimulate new business formation, enhance transportation systems, and fulfill other prerequisites associated with a lively urban core constitutes a critical foundation for the sustainability and optimal performance of the entrepreneurial community.”*

Furthermore, he emphasizes that *“the density of talent and research activity is a key factor in building an entrepreneurial ecosystem capable of generating tangible economic impacts at the state level.”* Such density not only strengthens regional competitiveness but also enables the ecosystem to operate more efficiently and effectively through increased interaction, knowledge exchange, and collaboration among actors.

Accordingly, RegionalESO emphasizes the existence of a symbiotic relationship between community development and entrepreneurship in building a sustainable ecosystem. The organization views its role not merely as directly supporting entrepreneurs, but increasingly as channeling resources toward strategic community-based initiatives. This approach is grounded in the belief that strengthening community capacity creates a more robust structural foundation for the long-term growth and sustainability of entrepreneurial activity.

## DISCUSSION

This study examines the role of entrepreneurial support organizations (ESOs) within the entrepreneurial ecosystem in shaping opportunities for transitional entrepreneurs in the city of Solo. Specifically, the study employs a multi-case study design (Stake, 2005, 2008) to trace the narratives of two Solo-based ESOs, namely TechESO and RegionalESO. The findings indicate that, in shaping transitional entrepreneurship in Solo, ESO narratives function to construct entrepreneurial identities (i.e., “who are we?”), orient entrepreneurs within the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem (i.e., “where are we positioned?”), and envision a collective future for both the ecosystem and transitional entrepreneurs (i.e., “what are we going to do?”). In this section, we discuss several key implications for the growing body of research on transitional entrepreneurship.

This article contributes to the literature examining the social processes and institutional arrangements that enable transitional entrepreneurs to navigate various forms of vulnerability and marginalization, by highlighting two central issues: the effects of entrepreneurial ecosystems and the role of ESO narratives in shaping social realities for transitional entrepreneurs. First, while prior studies have examined the role of external enablers (Manocha et al., 2021), social institutions (Amoako et al., 2021; Tao et al., 2021), and specific ESOs such as business incubators (Newman & Christensen, 2021) in supporting and/or constraining transitional entrepreneurs, this study advances the literature by adopting an ecosystem perspective that emphasizes the intersections among multiple ESOs within a given context.

We demonstrate that transitional entrepreneurs emerge across diverse economic sectors – ranging from neighborhood-based small businesses to high-growth, technology-oriented ventures – and that they are often served by multiple ESOs with distinct missions and social

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histories. Consequently, the narratives they encounter, as well as the functions performed by these ESO narratives, may be simultaneously competing and complementary.

The ESOs selected for this multi-case study operate on a considerably broader scope than the incubators and maker spaces that have been predominantly examined in the entrepreneurship literature (Bergman & McMullen, 2022). Both RegionalESO and TechESO engage in research activities, policy development, grant funding, and the provision of indirect support to a wide range of actors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, rather than focusing solely on the direct provision of assistance to individual entrepreneurs.

Moreover, the forms of support they offer extend beyond purely instrumental assistance (e.g., training programs and grants) to include identity work, sensemaking of broader ecosystem and economic trends, and the facilitation of strategic connections with customers and peers through which entrepreneurs can access tacit knowledge that would otherwise be difficult to obtain independently. In addition, ESOs help entrepreneurs envision a collective future in which they play a meaningful and consequential role.

These forms of support are particularly critical for transitional entrepreneurs, who often originate from underserved and marginalized contexts and lack intergenerational wealth, social capital, and institutional knowledge that are more readily available to other groups (Bruton et al., 2021; Nair & Chen, 2021).

Second, the findings of this study reveal both convergence and divergence between the two ESOs in how their narratives shape transitional entrepreneurship. While both RegionalESO and TechESO seek to expand the definitional boundaries of who is explicitly and implicitly recognized and privileged as an “entrepreneur,” clear limitations remain, particularly in the case of TechESO. For instance, TechESO does not include informal start-ups within its definition of entrepreneurship, instead concentrating on technology-based ventures that typically presuppose founders with higher educational credentials.

Both ESOs similarly emphasize the importance of inspiring prospective entrepreneurs; however, they rely on distinct narrative repertoires. RegionalESO, which primarily serves everyday entrepreneurs, tends to foreground narratives of resilience and solidarity that resonate more strongly with transitional entrepreneurs. In contrast, TechESO, with its focus on technology firms and venture capital financing, privileges narratives of extraordinary or breakaway success, often articulated through the metaphor of the “unicorn.”

In orienting transitional entrepreneurs within the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem, both ESOs identify significant temporal shifts, highlighting both enabling factors (e.g., historical access to expertise) and constraining conditions (such as the historical absence of entrepreneurial infrastructure for marginalized groups). Nevertheless, TechESO places greater emphasis on the recent influx of venture capital than does RegionalESO. In addition, both ESOs stress the importance of a “spirit of collaboration” and underscore the role of transitional entrepreneurs in revitalizing their communities. They also highlight mechanisms such as connecting entrepreneurs with other ecosystem actors, providing training in business pitching, and encouraging a “pay-it-forward” ethos toward aspiring founders. Collectively, these mechanisms are critical in helping transitional entrepreneurs comprehend ecosystem interdependencies and facilitating the transmission of key learning processes.



Regarding the final theme—envisioning a collective future—both ESOs emphasize the importance of cultivating a healthy and self-sustaining entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, they diverge in their approaches to addressing the need for accelerated investment and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) agendas. In promoting increased investment, RegionalESO more frequently frames entrepreneurial success stories as “unfinished” narratives that require continued support, whereas TechESO places greater emphasis on investors’ risk appetites and calls for coordinated public-private investment. Similarly, in advancing DEI objectives, RegionalESO tends to design policies oriented toward community development in underserved areas—thereby strengthening the foundational conditions for transitional entrepreneurship—while TechESO prioritizes the expansion of resources that directly support transitional entrepreneurs from marginalized backgrounds.

Although this qualitative comparative case study is not intended to generate empirical generalizations, future research should examine whether similar patterns of convergence and divergence emerge in other contexts, particularly among ESOs that focus on everyday entrepreneurs and technology-oriented entrepreneurs.

Third, this study highlights that in the context of Solo, the boundaries between transitional entrepreneurs and social and institutional entrepreneurs are frequently blurred. While transitional entrepreneurship primarily focuses on how, why, and when entrepreneurial actors from particular marginalized groups identify, enact, evaluate, or exploit opportunities as a consequence of—or within the context of—the constraints they face (Pidduck & Clark, 2021), social entrepreneurs generally pursue broader social missions or public goods, and institutional entrepreneurs seek to redefine and reshape existing institutions (Bruton et al., 2021).

## CONCLUSION

In this study, we demonstrate that transitional entrepreneurs not only pursue individual self-improvement but also contribute positively to community- and city-level outcomes. Through these contributions, transitional entrepreneurs simultaneously challenge—and ultimately transform—the roles of established institutions, including ESOs and other ecosystem actors. For example, both RegionalESO and TechESO were compelled to adjust their strategies over time: RegionalESO increasingly concentrated on neighborhood-based small businesses and transitional entrepreneurs, while TechESO evolved into a more vocal advocate for advancing diversity and inclusion agendas within startup financing.

Furthermore, the findings challenge narrow conceptions of who can be categorized as a transitional entrepreneur. While we acknowledge the importance of meaningful categorization (Bruton et al., 2021), and recognize that not all entrepreneurs from historically marginalized minority groups experience—or successfully overcome—significant constraints, we caution against the use of overly rigid categories. Such approaches risk obscuring or erasing the complex social, structural, and minority experiences that shape urban life in Solo.

## LIMITATION

Although much of the existing literature—including the present study—has focused on the types of constraints or adversities faced by transitional entrepreneurs, future research should further investigate the temporal dimensions of these challenges. For example, scholars may examine when such adversities occur in relation to individuals’ decisions to engage in transitional

entrepreneurship. Other studies could explore the role of individual and collective memory in shaping forms of trauma that may catalyze the emergence of transitional entrepreneurship.

Moreover, future research should move beyond questions concerning differences in narrative functions within entrepreneurial ecosystems toward analyses of how particular narratives are prioritized and emphasized by ecosystem members, as well as the implications of these processes for transitional entrepreneurs and marginalized communities. Finally, while this article examines narratives originating from only two ESOs within a single ecosystem, studies employing semantic network analysis or broader discourse analysis across a wider range of ecosystem actors may generate more comprehensive insights into how ESOs shape transitional entrepreneurship.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how transitional entrepreneurs make sense of the environments in which they operate. We extend conceptualizations of transitional entrepreneurship by foregrounding the critical role of narratives, which are often contested and fragmented. How ESOs talk about entrepreneurship has significant implications; there is power in the stories we hear, see, tell, and retell. Such narratives have the potential to shape the future of entrepreneurial ecosystems by defining the boundaries of what is perceived as possible and worthy of pursuit.

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