The Backpacker School: An empirical investigation of what it means to be an entrepreneurial school

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Abstract

What does it mean for a school to be entrepreneurial? While entrepreneurial education (EE) research has largely focused on classroom practices, less attention has been paid to institutional conditions across whole school organisations. This study investigates a large K–12 school organisation widely recognised for its entrepreneurial culture. Drawing on 451 written reflective dialogues with 100 employees using Designed Action Sampling, we inductively develop a seven-part framework describing key features of an entrepreneurial school: guiding ideas, view of humans, view of knowledge, and four cultures – workplace, leadership, education and development.

Findings show how entrepreneurial dimensions become institutionalised through shared vision, trustful relations, flexibility and distributed agency. Deductive analysis reveals that this entrepreneurial school organisation is grounded less in market-oriented logic and more in people-positive organising that mobilises fundamental human capacities – being passionate, positive, developmental, reflective, pragmatic, flexible, relational, resourceful and collaborative. The study also identifies a critical tension: strong entrepreneurial culture among employees does not automatically translate into strong entrepreneurial pedagogy for students. We conclude with implications through the lenses of Rosa's resonance theory and Bremer's people-positive organising, and outline contributions for research, policy and practice.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial school; Entrepreneurial education; Organisational culture; Institutional perspective; Whole-school approach; Resonance theory; People-positive organising*

1. Introduction

We know today that emotionally strong experiences of using one's knowledge to help others can make people significantly more entrepreneurial (Bell, 2020; Blenker et al., 2011; Hatt et al., 2024; Jones et al., 2020; Rae, 2005). Being entrepreneurial, broadly speaking, is then about creatively taking action (Pittaway & Cope, 2007), interacting with others (Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005), creating new kinds of value (Bruyat & Julien, 2001), learning from such experiences (Rae, 2005), being passionately motivated for a cause (Cardon et al., 2009) and persuading others to join in with their resources (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990).

Many policymakers, especially in the European Union (Bacigalupo et al., 2016), consider these capabilities so important that they should be offered to all citizens. Policy measures have been taken to infuse entrepreneurial education (EE) into all levels of education. From preschools, primary and secondary schools to higher education institutions and beyond. If successful, policymakers claim it will grow our economy (Volkmann et al., 2009), create many jobs (Jones & Iredale, 2010), strengthen our democracies (Bacigalupo et al., 2016), help us cope better with a global and changing world (Hytti & O'Gorman, 2004), enjoy life more fully (Goss, 2005) and help create new solutions to key societal issues (Kuratko, 2005). Thanks to decades of empirical scholarly work in EE, we know much about what individual teachers can do to accomplish this (Haneberg et al., 2022; Nabi et al., 2017; Neergaard et al., 2020). In short, teachers can adopt a broad competence view of entrepreneurship, use action-based value-creating pedagogy and create authentic opportunities for students to engage with the outside world (Seeber, 2021).

Still, in most countries we are not making much progress in EE (Fayolle, 2013; Hytti, 2018; Lackéus & Sävetun, 2025). Entrepreneurial experiences are mostly narrowly business-orientated, elective or extra-

curricular (Eurydice, 2025), delivered by lone teachers who are rarely backed up by colleagues more broadly (Johannisson, 2010; Surlemont, 2007). Instead, EE teachers often meet resistance from sceptical colleagues and from a rigid system (Gibb, 2002; Komulainen et al., 2011).

The problem now is rather that knowledge about how to make people more entrepreneurial is not much used by teachers. What is needed is knowledge of how EE as we know it today can be adopted more broadly across entire institutions. This is a policy- and research-to-practice gap, an implementation gap. To address this gap, an emerging scholarly trend has been to investigate EE with an institutional lens, studying institutional forces and power centres previously taken for granted (Brentnall et al., 2023). Scholars have for example investigated how school and university leaders can build an entrepreneurial culture in their institutions (Hämäläinen et al., 2018; Kirkley, 2017; Wibowo & Saptono, 2018).

This study contributes to institutional-level EE research by investigating what it means to be an entrepreneurial school. Frida Education, a large family-owned private school organisation in Sweden widely known for being entrepreneurial, was selected for study. The organisation employs 800 people and comprises seven preschools, seven primary schools and two secondary schools, spanning what in the US is called the K-12 age level from 5 to 18 years old. Frida Education is a publicly funded school organisation with the same cost level as comparable public schools. Its founders have for 30 years built an organisation with a core vision and mission of educating “rail-backpackers”. This metaphor has been used internally to express a strong ambition to develop students who can navigate the world creatively, independently and with others, i.e., entrepreneurially. A long-term vision has thus been used to build an entrepreneurial school organisation, without using the term “entrepreneurial”.

To study the organisation empirically we used two digital research instruments – the dialogic reflective tool Loopme and the qualitative data analysis tool Dedoose. We collected, coded and analysed 451 written reflective dialogues with 100 randomly selected employees representing all roles in all parts of the organisation. The resulting rich dataset consisted of around 100,000 words of reflection data. Each reflection was quantified by the respondent, in accordance with Designed Action Sampling (DAS) principles; a novel method for capturing deep reflective insights through structured digital micro-reflection (Lackéus & Sävetun, 2025).

We used Appreciative Inquiry as a theoretical lens to focus the reflective dialogues on what participants perceived as working well (Cooperrider et al., 2008). We thus gained insights into how those working inside an entrepreneurial school organisation articulated which entrepreneurial dimensions helped them in their everyday job. Data were used to analyse how entrepreneurial norms and practices are embedded in their everyday work, and how this differs from more traditional schools according to participants. Through this, we aimed to contribute an institutionally grounded understanding of what it means to be an entrepreneurial school.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we review literature on EE from an organisational perspective, culminating in a broad, institutional framework for understanding entrepreneurial organisations. Second, we present the case organisation and outline our reflection-based methodology. Third, we report findings through descriptive, inductive and deductive analyses, including contrast-based interpretations. Fourth, we discuss the case as an example of broad entrepreneurial organising in K–12 education, including its people-positive and relation-oriented principles, leadership dynamics, potential tensions and semantic choices. We conclude by outlining implications for research, practice and policy.

2. Literature review

Our literature review takes entrepreneurial schools as a starting point, and then broadens into educational leadership and more general entrepreneurial perspectives. This culminates in a literature-based framework for entrepreneurial educational institutions.

2.1 Entrepreneurial schools

EE can be studied on five different levels: (1) international, (2) national / curricular, (3) local / municipal, (4) institutional / school and (5) classroom / teacher / student levels (Pihkala et al., 2009). The fourth level

of schools is an unusual and under-studied focus, delimiting away most previous work in EE (Hämäläinen, 2023). Recent literature reviews on entrepreneurial schools reveal a very young and marginal scholarly field, taking off around 2014 (Frentz et al., 2025; Ho & Chen, 2026).

Judging from the nascent literature base, an entrepreneurial school is characterised by creativity, innovation, proactiveness, experimentation, interdisciplinarity, community engagement and flexibility (e.g., Hämäläinen, 2023; Kirkley, 2017). Entrepreneurial schools frequently rely on entrepreneurial leadership, a shared vision, an entrepreneurial organisational culture, a focus on opportunities and strong teacher development structures emphasising internal and external collaboration (Hardie et al., 2020; Ho & Chen, 2026).

A classic dichotomy in EE is present also on school level, in the form of two main interpretations of what it means to be entrepreneurial, a broad and a narrow one (cf. Van Gelderen, 2023). In the narrow interpretation, labeled entrepreneur-*ship* schools, students learn how to create new business ideas, write business plans and take part in idea competitions (e.g., Lindner, 2019). In the broader interpretation labeled entrepreneur-*ial* schools, business topics are largely absent and students instead develop entrepreneurial competencies in all subjects and throughout all stages of schooling (e.g., Kirkley, 2017). Many authors advocate for the broader interpretation to take precedence, at least at lower levels of schooling (Kirkley, 2017; Sagar, 2015; Seeber, 2021).

A major theme in entrepreneurial schools literature is that it is the *whole school* that should be entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurial values need to be an integral part of the entire school (Lindner, 2019), holistically present in all subjects (Eurydice, 2025), part of the school's vision, strategy and yearly plans (Hämäläinen, 2023) and supported by teacher training and dedicated time for pedagogical development work (Sagar, 2015). Otherwise, EE runs the risk of soon becoming an extinct fad (Kirkley, 2017).

2.2 Leadership in entrepreneurial schools

Having outlined what characterises entrepreneurial schools, our review now shifts to how such schools may be realised in practice. Here, literature revolves around the crucial role of school leadership, often conceptualised through entrepreneurial leadership exercised by principals (e.g., Balasi et al., 2023; Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz & Pashiardis, 2022; Frentz et al., 2025). Originating in management research, entrepreneurial leadership has been associated with opportunity recognition, innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-orientation and the ability to mobilise others around a compelling vision (Renko et al., 2015). When this leadership style is translated into a school context, it tends to take on a more nuanced form centred on social value creation and adapted to the pedagogical, ethical and bureaucratic conditions of public education (Ho & Chen, 2026).

A small number of empirical studies provide more detailed accounts of what principals do in practice when establishing entrepreneurial schools. Drawing on case-based research, Kirkley (2017) describes a staged process in which principals initially co-develop a high-level vision and strategic direction with staff, deliberately distancing the school from narrow, business-centric interpretations of entrepreneurship. Central to this process is the articulation of shared values and sustained communication around the purpose and anticipated benefits for both teachers and students. Kirkley highlights the importance of forming a committed core group of teachers who act as a driving "cell" in developing and refining the entrepreneurial approach. Through this group, entrepreneurial practices are gradually embedded in everyday routines and professional dialogue. As engagement broadens among staff, the initiative increasingly shifts from being leader-driven to being culturally sustained. However, the study also identifies substantial obstacles, including entrenched conceptions of teaching and learning, as well as teachers' desire for control over their classroom practices. Progress therefore depends on sustained leadership over time. Reported outcomes include increased student engagement and perceived relevance of schooling, improved academic results and reduced disruptive behaviour.

Hämäläinen's (2023) large-scale study of principals provides a more systematic analysis of leadership practices across schools. Findings indicate that principals who actively integrate EE into

strategic plans, school development and teacher training are more likely to see it embedded in everyday practice. The study also identifies principals' own EE training as a significant predictor of school-level entrepreneurial activity. Hämäläinen (2023) also provides one of the most comprehensive summaries of literature on entrepreneurial schools, highlighting the important role of principals in pedagogical leadership. Since EE is rarely required or monitored by educational authorities, and since EE requires significant training and pedagogical development efforts among teachers, it is only through principals personally dedicated to entrepreneurial schools that EE will spread more broadly in educational institutions. Being a high-impact but also a high-effort pedagogical approach, EE relies strongly upon principals and their exercise of entrepreneurial leadership.

Together, these studies suggest that leadership in entrepreneurial schools combines strategic direction-setting with long-term capacity building and cultural embedding.

2.3 Employees in entrepreneurial schools

While whole-school models and entrepreneurial leadership provide important structural and cultural preconditions, entrepreneurial schools also rely on sustained entrepreneurial thought and action among many individual employees. Teachers play key roles, but other professions can also be entrepreneurial, such as coordinators, administrators, counsellors, special education professionals, kitchen staff and facilities staff. Yet the literature tells us relatively little about what entrepreneurial thought and action actually entails in the everyday work of an entrepreneurial school. This constitutes a notable gap in extant research.

To address this gap analytically, we draw on research on entrepreneurial behaviour in existing organisations – *intrapreneurship* – as well as on entrepreneurial methods more broadly. Although these literatures were primarily developed outside educational settings, they offer well-established individual-level operationalisations of opportunity-oriented thought and action that we will later use to analyse our studied case.

2.3.1 Entrepreneurial behaviour at the employee level

An entrepreneurial employee is "someone who cares so much about an issue that she takes collaborative action despite inherent uncertainty and risk, trying to create something new envisioned to be of significant value for others" (Lackéus et al., 2020, p.9). This often starts in experiments with new ideas around an issue one feels strong emotional ownership over (Mustafa et al., 2018). It requires a certain amount of autonomy, action orientation, slack time, courage and flexibility (Kearney & Meynhardt, 2016). Sometimes managers support such "pet projects", especially if the organisation has an established entrepreneurial culture, but more often they do not (Birkinshaw, 2000). In school contexts, the emotional starting point of entrepreneurial processes has been labeled *teacher agency*, framing teachers as agents of change who proactively reshape their practice rather than simply reproduce existing routines (Priestley et al., 2013).

What entrepreneurial employees often do next is to search for opportunities to improve their practice in novel ways in an area of own passion and strength (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Kuratko et al., 2011). They do this without neglecting all the routine work that needs to be carried out (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). Their main goal here is not so much to help themselves but rather to help others such as customers or colleagues in new ways (Morris, 1998). In schools it is often about finding new opportunities to improve the core process of student learning, especially since teachers' emotional bonds with students function as a lens through which educational change is interpreted and enacted (Hargreaves, 2005).

The better an employee succeeds in creating new kinds of value for others, and the more they learn from the process themselves, the more we tend to label it entrepreneurial (Bruyat & Julien, 2001). This points to a crucial aspect of being entrepreneurial, namely the dynamic and experience-based expansion of knowledge through action and deep reflection, often intensified by emotionally charged critical events

(Cope, 2005). Entrepreneurial employees learn continuously and intensively by transforming their prior experiences into new knowledge that guides how future improvement opportunities are recognised and acted upon (Politis, 2005). They are reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983).

Having covered some primarily individual dimensions, we now draw on entrepreneurial methods to cover also collective dimensions of being entrepreneurial in an established organisation.

2.3.2 Entrepreneurial methods guiding employee behaviour

An entrepreneurial method is a coherent set of principles and guidelines that can help people take entrepreneurial action (Mansoori, 2018). Three commonly used entrepreneurial methods are *effectuation* (start with your available means and solicit others' commitments under uncertainty), *lean startup methodology* (test your value hypotheses on others through build-measure-learn cycles) and *design thinking* (frame problems from a user perspective and iterate through prototyping) (Mansoori & Lackéus, 2019). These methods are all illustrated as circular processes, emphasising that entrepreneurial work progresses through repeated cycles of action, feedback and adjustment (Brown, 2008; Ries, 2011; Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005).

These methods stipulate that entrepreneurial employees act as future-builders who shape valuable possibilities for others by deliberately influencing what can be controlled in situations of fundamental uncertainty (Sarasvathy, 2009). They act despite not knowing all the answers beforehand and trust an emergent and flexible process rather than planning everything from the start. This involves sensemaking with others, whether labeled co-creators (effectuation), customers (lean startup) or users (design thinking). It makes entrepreneurial action a deeply relational activity, where face-to-face interactions and socially embedded trustful relationships generate the emotional energy and mutual commitments that enable people to experiment, adjust and move forward together under uncertainty (Goss, 2005; Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011). In a school context, such interactions with colleagues, students and external partners to improve a school is conceptualised in various ways. A widespread term is *collaborative professional learning,* often enacted within *professional learning communities (PLCs)* where teachers collectively inquire into the impact of their practice on student outcomes and adjust accordingly (Timperley et al., 2008).

Entrepreneurial methods also advise people to creatively use each other's competencies and networks to expand their collective resource base (Sarasvathy, 2009). An entrepreneurial employee should not feel constrained by institutionalised roles and definitions of resources, but instead feel free to redefine and recombine what is already at hand (Baker & Nelson, 2005). This requires trustful teamwork characterised by collective responsibility (effectuation), tolerance for failure (lean startup), interdisciplinarity and emotional commitment (design thinking) (Mansoori & Lackéus, 2019). Empirical studies of entrepreneurial teams show how team trust helps members cope with uncertainty, overcome diversity and cope with challenges (Klotz et al., 2014; Williams Middleton & Nowell, 2018).

2.4 A framework for entrepreneurial schools

Together, these perspectives help us predict that entrepreneurial organisations (such as, but not limited to, entrepreneurial schools) are sustained not only by leadership and entrepreneurial pedagogy, but also by recurring patterns – a culture – of employees acting and thinking in entrepreneurial ways. To empower our analysis, we have organised literature into a framework of nine dimensions for entrepreneurial employees, see Table 1. This framework is a further development of a framework developed over a decade by Mansoori and Lackéus (2019).

3. Methodology

This study investigated the culture of an entrepreneurial school organization through a structured micro-reflection approach. Rather than relying on interviews or survey instruments, we employed a digital reflection- and dialogue-based application of Designed Action Sampling (DAS) (Lackéus & Sävetun, 2025). 320 randomly sampled employees, drawn from a complete list of all employees using the RAND function

in Excel, were invited to a digital platform where they could reflect deeply to the authors around what they perceived as valuable, meaningful and distinctive about Frida Education as a workplace. They were explicitly asked to exemplify and contrast their views, and to articulate recommendations to any other organisation perhaps wanting to emulate Frida Education.

Table 1. Framework for entrepreneurial employees in established organisations.

Dimension	An entrepreneurial employee	In contrast to	References
Redirection power	*Secures high autonomy, sense of ownership, personal commitment, and legitimacy to act*	*Low autonomy, low flexibility, adherence to fixed plans*	*(Kearney & Meynhardt, 2016; Priestley et al., 2013)*
Opportunity orientation	*Focuses on opportunities and strengths*	*A focus on problems and deficiencies*	*(Cooperrider et al., 2008; Kuratko et al., 2011; Morris, 1998)*
Novel value creation for others	*Creates novel kinds of value for others in areas one feels strongly about, while still maintaining everyday operations*	*Sole focus on delivering routine value according to predefined plans and directives*	*(Bruyat & Julien, 2001; Hargreaves, 2005; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013)*
Knowledge expansion and learning	*Expands knowledge through tentative action, deep reflection and continuous learning that guides future action-taking*	*Relying on fixed knowledge available in literature, textbooks and guidelines*	*(Cope, 2005; Politis, 2005; Schön, 1983)*
Iterative experimentation	*Works in iterative cycles of experimentation, feedback and adjustment under uncertainty*	*Linear planning in predefined steps and with set goals*	*(Brown, 2008; Ries, 2011; Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005)*
Uncertainty management	*Deals with an unpredictable future through flexible adaptation and shared sensemaking*	*Detailed planning, fixed control structures and set goals*	*(Mansoori & Lackéus, 2019; Sarasvathy, 2009)*
Personal interactions	*Engages in relationally grounded and trust-based interactions, securing mutual commitments*	*Formal, role-bound interactions in predefined meetings*	*(Goss, 2005; Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011)*
Flexible resource management	*Gathers resources such as time, competencies, people, materials in creative ways by recombining beyond formal role boundaries*	*Resource allocation confined to predefined roles, departments and budgets*	*(Baker & Nelson, 2005; Sarasvathy, 2009)*
Trustful team collaboration	*Establishes high levels of trust, collective responsibility, shared emotional commitment, inter-disciplinarity and tolerance for failure*	*Control focus, individualised work, rigid role boundaries and limited support*	*(Klotz et al., 2014; Mansoori & Lackéus, 2019; Williams Middleton & Nowell, 2018)*

Through repeated email reminders over four months, we brought up the number of active participants to 100 employees (31% of invited) who completed a total of 451 micro-reflections, comprising 59,922 words of reflections. Each micro-reflection was emotionally quantified and thematically tagged by each respondent in line with DAS methodology. Follow-up dialogues with respondents added another 42,553 words to the resulting dataset. This method enabled the systematic surfacing of lived organizational culture over time. It represents a rare opportunity to inductively study how an entrepreneurial workplace is experienced, narrated and reproduced from within, without ever exposing respondents to the term *entrepreneurial*.

3.1 Qualifying the case

Prior research conducted within the organisation provides empirical grounds for viewing Frida Education as an entrepreneurial school organisation. Blomgren's doctoral thesis (2016) highlights how the

organisation has been early and systematic in pedagogical innovation, particularly in digital transformation and in designing learning environments that position students as active, self-regulating and co-creative learners. Employees are described as development-oriented and proactive, embedded in structures that emphasise growth, responsibility and continuous improvement rather than compliance.

Complementing this, Sülau's doctoral thesis (2019) portrays an organisational culture characterised by trust, relational capacity-building and a negotiated balance between structure and autonomy. Teachers are positioned not as implementers of externally defined methods, but as reflective practitioners who adapt, reinterpret and reshape initiatives in light of local conditions. Professional learning is embedded in the organisation's routines, and innovation emerges through interaction between top-down regulations and bottom-up agency. A humanistic view of students and staff, positioning individuals as capable, responsible and inherently valuable, underpins everyday practice.

Taken together, these characteristics align with broad definitions of entrepreneurial organising: a long-term value-driven vision, proactive adaptation to external change, distributed initiative-taking, experimentation and embedded learning. Frida Education therefore qualifies as a theoretically meaningful case of entrepreneurial schools, where entrepreneurial thought and action are institutionally embedded rather than confined to isolated initiatives.

3.2 Collecting data

A method called Designed Action Sampling (DAS) was used to collect data. It is a structured research methodology for capturing experience-based reflections as analysable data (Lackéus & Sävetun, 2025). Study leaders design action-oriented tasks, participants carry them out and then write micro-reflections afterwards. In a DAS study, participants submit brief and experience-based written reflections in response to action-based prompts. They are also asked to quantify their experiences and to engage in digital dialogues with study leaders, one discussion thread for each action-based reflection. This combines qualitative depth with quantification and scalability. The resulting large-scale, mixed and often longitudinal datasets have been shown to trigger deep insights among people involved (Boström et al., 2025; Morland & Lever, 2024; Tjulin et al., 2024; Westerberg, 2022).

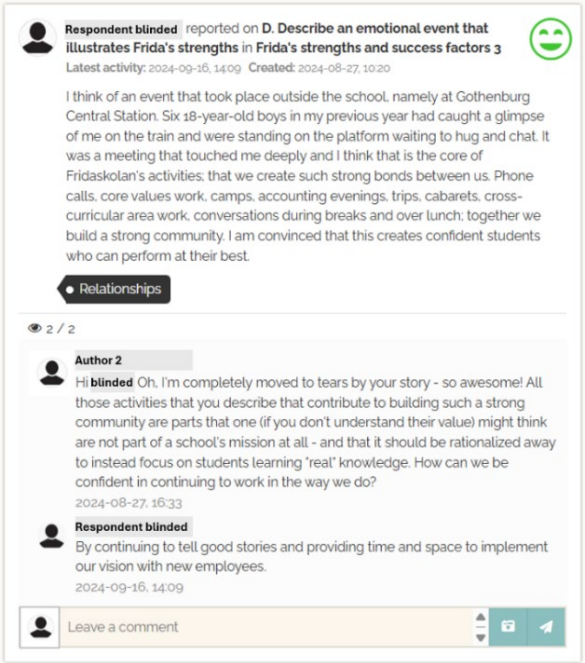

Figure 1. *An illustration of how the discussion thread part of the SSM platform Loopme looks like in practice.*

DAS is typically supported by a digital Scientific Social Media (SSM) platform for participant reflection and for the subsequent dialogues between researchers and participants (Lackéus & Sävetun, 2025). Using an SSM platform feels like using a social media platform, see Figure 1. However, SSM platforms differ from commercial social media in that they are purpose-built for research, enable controlled sampling, handle informed consent, allow for trustful private interaction, secure data storage, ad-free usage and tailored analysis functions. In this study, participants were invited to register as a user in the SSM platform Loopme and then reflect, quantify by choosing among a predefined set of "tags" and emotion states, and discuss their experiences in a comment thread with the authors. A tag is a short phrase, such as the one chosen by the participant in Figure 1 – "Relationships" – that summarizes a theme, effect, experience, or behavior of interest in the learning process.

In contrast to many other DAS studies, these participants were not asked to take action, but rather to reflect deeply upon five different topics: (1) what is unique with Frida Education, (2) recall examples

from practice typical of Frida Education, (3) articulate the unique difference with Frida Education compared to other organisations, (4) recall an emotionally charged event typical of Frida Education, and (5) articulate recommendations to other organisations perhaps wanting to emulate Frida Education's strengths. These questions were designed based on Appreciative Inquiry principles of focusing on strenghts and what works well, rather than on problems and deficits (Cooperrider et al., 2008). DAS was chosen as a method here since it allowed for an organisational culture to be articulated from within, at a scale that would not have been feasible through interviews. The term "entrepreneurial" was never introduced to participants, in order to not bias or confuse respondents around entrepreneurial perspectives.

The dialogical architecture, characteristic of DAS, allowed for clarification, probing, and deepening of responses, thereby increasing reflective depth. At the same time, it inevitably positioned the researchers as active co-constructors of meaning. Unlike survey-based approaches, the method did not treat culture as a set of pre-defined variables. Instead, meaning emerged inductively through iterative written exchanges between participants and researchers, allowing culture to be articulated over time.

One author was employed at Frida Education as a researcher and was well known within the organisation, while the other was external but had prior professional contact with some staff. Neither held any managerial or evaluative responsibility. This insider–outsider configuration shaped the dialogical character of the study: it facilitated trust and contextual understanding while also contributing analytical distance. We acknowledge that pre-existing relationships may have influenced how reflections were articulated, but treat this relational dynamic as an inherent feature of dialogical inquiry rather than as bias to be eliminated. This is in line with Neale (2018, p.9-10) who describes qualitative longitudinal research as a process of "walking alongside" participants.

3.3 Analysing the data

All reflections, dialogue threads and quantifications were exported from Loopme and prepared for analysis in Dedoose, a software for qualitative and mixed-methods data analysis (an alternative to Nvivo). The dataset comprised 102,475 words of text, and 1,895 quantifications. Prior to import, the data were structured in Excel to ensure compatibility with Dedoose. Participant ID, question number and staff type were merged into each reflection so that relevant metadata remained visible during coding. The dataset was sorted by school level and participant ID before being imported via spreadsheet import.

The analysis proceeded iteratively. First, both authors independently and inductively developed their own interpretative framework based on recurring concepts in the data. These preliminary structures were then compared and consolidated into a common coding framework consisting of seven main categories and an initial set of 40 subcategories. The ambition was to reduce redundancy and arrive at analytically meaningful and value-neutral labels that captured the breadth of expressions inductively found in the material.

Coding was conducted manually in Dedoose. Initial open coding was followed by an iterative consolidation process resembling axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), in which codes were reorganised into higher-order categories (cf. Gioia et al., 2013). As coding progressed, additional subcategories were added and existing ones revised to better reflect emergent patterns in the data. Segments ranging from single phrases to entire paragraphs were coded depending on analytical relevance. Automated coding functions were deliberately not used. Coding discrepancies were discussed through memo writing and discussions until agreement was reached. No new main categories emerged during the later stages of coding, indicating conceptual stabilisation. Each author coded about half of the 451 reflections. The resulting coding framework is presented in section 4.3.

We also analysed code frequencies, co-occurrences, emotional quantifications, taggings and the reflections themselves to support interpretation. In a final step, the coding framework itself was interpreted also deductively in light of the literature-based framework for entrepreneurial organisations presented in Table 1 above.

4. Findings

First an overview is given around the resulting dataset. Then some overarching patterns in answers to the five reflective questions are presented, followed by inductive insights generated from coding the dataset in Dedoose. This leads up to deductive findings being disclosed around how Frida Education can be regarded an *entrepreneurial* school organisation.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 2 shows how the 100 participants are distributed across the organisation, how many reflections they submitted, how their emotion quantifications varied, which tags were the most common ones, and how response rates varied across the sample. *Relations* was the tag chosen most frequently by participants, followed by *work environment* and *students*. This gave an early indication of the important role of relationships in Frida Education. Notable is how *pedagogy* was one of the least chosen tags across the organisation.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics from reflection quantifications in the SSM tool Loopme.*

Group of respondents	Partici-pants	Reflec-tions	Emotion average	Three most common tags *Percentages indicate share of reflections tagged with the tag*	Response rate
After-school	8	38	+1,58	Relations 79%, Students 63%, Pedagogy 58%	16%
Preschool	13	51	+1,92	Relations 76%, Work environment 75%, Organising 57%	22%
Primary	49	220	+1,62	Relations 63%, Work environment 50%, Students 43%	49%
Secondary	9	43	+1,49	Relations 67%, Organising 51%, Work environment 42%	30%
Leadership	12	59	+1,71	Relations 81%, Leadership 51%, Work environment 51%	40%
Support staff	9	40	+1,45	Students 55%, Work environment 53%, Relations 48%	18%
Totals	100	451	+1,64	Relations 67%, Work environment 53%, Students 45% A good colleague 43%, Organising 41%, Pedagogy 33%, Leadership 31%	31%

The 451 submitted reflections from the 100 participants articulated a broad variety of overarching ideas concerning the organisation and its view of human beings. Many reflections also touched upon more mundane everyday practice, spanning the four different cultural domains identified in the coding procedure: workplace culture, leadership culture, educational culture and development culture. A seventh recurring theme was respondents' general views on knowledge and learning.

4.2 Answers to the five reflective questions

The five reflective questions asked to all participants resulted in distinctly different kinds of answers, revealing how uniqueness can be constructed and described at multiple levels.

4.2.1 Question 1: what is unique about Fridaskolorna

General answers around uniqueness focused on organizational culture and identity. Respondents articulated uniqueness through abstract concepts such as a shared vision to "educate rail-backpackers", a familiar "we-feeling", systemic thinking and what many called "Frida-spirit", rather than specific practices. Reflections described an almost beyond words organizational culture that transcends individual actions. Some responses grappled with the question of origins: why is it like this, attributing it variously to intentional leadership, careful recruitment of like-minded, sustained work with vision and principles, and a self-reinforcing culture where values are continuously enacted. An illustrative quote:

> *"When I think about Fridaskolan as a school and as my workplace I think of home and family. What is unique with Frida as a school is the familiar feeling that characterizes the walls in the mother school in Vänersborg. As a guiding principle through all the years we see each student and staff member, no matter which adult, as an individual and human being."*

4.2.2 Question 2: typical everyday examples

When asked to provide everyday examples of the Frida Education culture, these centred on how organizational structures enable relational practices in everyday situations. Systematic greeting rituals ensuring that people feel seen, flexible scheduling enabling adaptation to student needs, distributed leadership making all staff share responsibility for all students, physical spaces designed for encounters such as shared breakfasts in the restaurant. Respondents described 'how we do things here' as deliberate cultural engineering rather than fortunate accidents. Many expressed pride in having systematically solved problems that other schools leave to individual teachers. An illustrative story:

> *"Recently a relatively serious incident occurred between two students in year 5 at one of our schools. There was bloodshed, hospital visits and many tears. (...) Upset involved guardians screamed for police reports. (...) That's when we come together. (...) We were many wise heads who joined together. Calmly, methodically, seriously and with a large portion of systems theory behind us. Many came and offered their help. Student health took care of the children and the teachers in the work team. School leadership participated in circle conversations, guardians were contacted and involved. (...) And the best of all - there was no police report. (...) It is always WE. In success and adversity."*

4.2.3 Question 3: the unique difference compared

In answers provided here, uniqueness was instead described through explicit contrast and comparison. Respondents positioned Frida Education against their previous workplaces, their own schooling or colleagues' experiences elsewhere, constructing difference through negation: what Frida Education is *not*. The dominant contrasts centered on trust versus control (top-down management, rigid schedules, prescribed methods), collaboration versus isolation (teachers working alone behind closed doors, departmental silos, hierarchical divisions between staff categories), and abundance versus scarcity in professional development (meetings filled with administrative trivia, absent leadership, stagnant pedagogy). Some respondents expressed sadness that basic relational values constitute a difference at all, suggesting these should be universal. There was a tension between pride in Frida Education's distinctiveness and discomfort that fundamental humanistic principles are apparently rare in education. An illustrative quote:

> *"…the difference is the closeness between student and staff [, it] is completely different from what I was used to from previous employments. But also the closeness to decisions, if I want some change, believe in it, then it's no more than a conversation away to either the nearest principal or [CEO] or someone else and you can get green light the same day. In municipal [school] I drove a small matter for 3 years until I quit, and the matter died with me and never went through."*

4.2.4 Question 4: emotionally strong events

In question 4, answers shifted to deeply personal and often very emotional narratives that made organizational values tangible through lived experience. Respondents shared stories of students who transformed from school-refusers to engaged learners, colleagues who received flowers and support during personal crises, parents who cried with gratitude at meetings and former students who returned years later to express how they had been seen and valued. Caring relationships were described as systematically enacted rather than left to chance. Many respondents explicitly connected their personal stories to Frida's organizational structures, demonstrating how abstract values become emotionally charged reality. An illustrative story:

> *"There are many examples over the years but one of the strongest things is a student who comes from school failures and enters us with poor self-confidence. But over the years the student becomes more and more self-confident, passes school with grades in all subjects and has above all established themselves socially and thrives very very well. It is an example of a success that I think has much to do with our ability to protect the individual, build relationships, see the possibilities, believe in the individual and their ability to succeed."*

4.2.5 Question 5: recommendations to other schools

Here the discourse went from description to prescription, putting words on the transferability of Frida Education's uniqueness. Many recommendations centered on establishing a clear, lived vision that permeates all organizational levels. Another dominant theme was relational infrastructure – systematic greeting rituals, shared meals, collaborative planning time, open classrooms and deliberate structures that force interaction across traditional boundaries between staff categories, subjects, and year groups. Several respondents suggested that schools should "discriminate" based on values alignment, accepting that not all teachers will thrive in or desire a highly relational, socially open environment. This sparked meta-reflection about whether Frida Education's success depends on selecting particular personality types or whether the culture itself can transform people. Some respondents expressed frustration that their recommendations sound so simple yet remain rare, attributing this gap to lack of courage, entrenched individualism, stress-driven short-termism or fundamental disagreements about education's purpose. An illustrative quote:

> *"I would recommend trying to think away the "I"-perspective to a large extent. Instead of thinking "Why should I do this" or "What do I get out of this" you need to adopt a more collective approach and see yourself as a resource. I think many easily get stuck thinking about their own workload, or that you "shouldn't have to" do different things, but then I think the work environment suffers."*

4.3 Inductive findings: Frida Education's organisational culture

The coding procedure resulted in an inductive framework illustrating Frida Education's organisational culture, see Table 3. Seven interrelated domains together articulate Frida Education's organisational culture. They depict an organisation characterised by relational density, trustful teamwork, distributed initiative-taking, flexible structures and continuous development. Shared guiding ideas and a strong humanistic view of people form a normative foundation, while leadership, workplace and educational practices function as relational infrastructure enabling everyday enactment. A forward-leaning development culture provides the dynamic engine that keeps the organisation in motion.

Coding frequencies shown in Table 3 reveal which themes were common and which themes were more rare in participant reflections. Consistent with the tagging pattern, pedagogy again was among the least frequently mentioned themes, now also joined by view of knowledge. Of the four cultures on a practical level – workplace, leadership, education and development – it was leadership culture which was most frequently commented upon.

4.4 Deductive findings: How is Frida Education entrepreneurial?

Explicit entrepreneurial semantics are largely absent in Table 3. However, this does not imply that Frida Education is not an entrepreneurial school organisation. To return to our research focus, a deductive analysis was therefore conducted. We reinterpreted the inductively generated framework in Table 3 through the lens of the nine entrepreneurial dimensions in Table 1. The result is shown in Table 4. Contrast-oriented answers to Question 3 were used to juxtapose entrepreneurial dimensions against their opposites as described by respondents.

Frida Education does not appear entrepreneurial in a narrow, business-orientated sense. Instead, entrepreneurial dimensions are institutionalised through a relational and developmental organisational logic in which autonomy is paired with responsibility, experimentation is normalised through trust, and value creation is framed in terms of human growth rather than market outcomes. Entrepreneurial action is sustained less by individual heroism than by shared vision, strong relationships and collective responsibility enabling distributed agency across roles and school levels. This suggests that entrepreneurial schooling, in this case, is less about introducing specific programmes or pedagogies, and more about cultivating cultural conditions.

Table 3. *Inductively generated framework of Frida Education's organisational culture.*

Category	Subcategory	Freq	Illustrative verbatim quotes from respondent reflections
Guiding ideas			
Organi-sational ideas *(average coding frequency - ACF: 94)*	Relations	239	*"we take care of each other", "relationships are the most important thing"*
	Collaboration	199	*"together nothing is impossible", "we stand up for each other"*
	Vision	145	*"we educate backpackers", "a clear common vision", "a living vision"*
	Familiar feel	121	*"we are like one big family", "it feels like home", "the we-feeling"*
	Flexibility	74	*"we can easily rethink", "we can adapt schedules", "quick adaptations"*
	Influence / participation	56	*"everyone should feel involved", "one is seen and listened to"*
	Rail-backpacker	49	*"strong confidence", "courage and curiosity", "global citizens"*
	Systems thinking	34	*"we all are parts of a larger whole", "a foundation in systems theory"*
	High expectations	33	*"young people can", "high goals for employees", "challenge the students"*
	Celebrate successes	12	*"highlight good examples", "send praise emails", "say how proud I am"*
View of humans *(ACF: 58)*	Equal worth of all	86	*"all children belong to everyone", "everyone is equally important"*
	Strength-based	63	*"we focus on what works", "see the strengths in children who struggle"*
	Everyone is competent	56	*"play to each other's best foot", "take advantage of each other's differences"*
	Empathy	48	*"teachers genuinely care", "we are careful to see each other", "see them all"*
	Team before individual	39	*"don't just look to ourselves but lift our gaze", "the team before the self"*
View of knowledge *(ACF: 29)*	Active participatory students	49	*"a school that works to get active students", "student influence is central"*
	Whole-person abilities	47	*"developing the whole individual", "academically, socially and emotionally"*
	Creativity / curiosity	43	*"we awaken a curiosity in the students", "be creative in our teaching"*
	Real-world oriented	25	*"take the school out into society", "real problems and situations"*
	Meaningful learning	24	*"adapt their learning according to interests", "understand its relevance"*
	Cross-disciplinary	18	*"collaborate across subject boundaries", "see connections", "thematic work"*
	Dialogical learning	17	*"circle conversations", "make your voice heard", "co-create learning"*
	Lifelong learning	10	*"one should learn for life", "find their fire/passion in life"*
Practical enactments of guiding ideas			
Workplace culture *(ACF: 32)*	Greeting others / say hello	86	*"we greet everyone we meet", "it becomes very personal and warm"*
	Engagement	67	*"teachers really care", "willing to do the little extra", "genuine interest"*
	Joy at work	64	*"laughter that lined the day", "an open climate", "a positive energy"*
	Strong teams	50	*"no one stands alone", "take turns pulling", "plan together"*
	Professionalism	21	*"well-educated", "extremely professional conduct", "solution-focused"*
	Food	20	*"free breakfast", "fantastic food", "restaurant is the natural meeting place"*
	Co-creation	16	*"do things together", "collective approach", "alone is not strongest"*
	Physical environment	11	*"our fine premises", "aesthetically appealing", "encourage collaboration"*
	Open rooms	9	*"classrooms are always open", "staff room is open", "always feels welcome"*
	Shared understanding	6	*"everyone strives in the same direction", "a strong sense of community"*
	Internal job shadowing	4	*"all staff and with all students", "increases the good relationships"*
Leader-ship culture *(ACF: 42)*	Relational trust / confidence	94	*"felt great trust from my principal", "between students and teachers"*
	Practice-near leaders	63	*"present and attentive principals", "involved in operations", "are on site"*
	Clarity and communication	57	*"clear guidelines and leadership", "talk with each other, not about each other"*
	Freedom with responsibility	43	*"free reins", "a strong mandate", "high sense of responsibility and pride"*
	Institutional trust	35	*"feel management's trust", "trust in the staff's competence"*
	Giving appreciation	34	*"shine on each other", "notice and reward small progress", "encourage them"*
	Flat structure	33	*"not so hierarchical", "no hierarchy", "prestige-free", "short decision paths"*
	Culture carriers	25	*"old Frida foxes", "strong informal leadership", "way to pass on our vision"*
	Praise conversations / emails	23	*"give each other praise", "to a student's family has a large and positive effect"*
	Positive gossip	12	*"elevate one's colleagues", "praise from parents", "strength in brag-gossip"*
Education culture *(ACF: 18)*	Individualised	39	*"adapt it to the child", "unique needs", "variation and diversity in teaching"*
	Location-flexible learning	34	*"excursions", "invite reality to the school", "learning happens everywhere"*
	Circle dialogue	25	*"sit on our mat on the floor in a circle", "working more relationally"*
	Cross-curricular theme work	23	*"common thematic project", "across subject boundaries", "joint planning"*
	The schedule is not fixed	18	*"no schedule is set in stone", "easy to change the schedule", "flexibility"*
	Outdoor education	8	*"outdoor school every week", "stay out in nature", "out of school"*
	Co-created introduction	5	*"get all students participatory", "lessons, conferences, parent meetings"*
	Small-scale	5	*"we are a small school", "a genuine family business", "everyone feels seen"*
	Starting & ending together	2	*"we start with a shared breakfast in our restaurant and go through the day"*
Develop-ment culture *(ACF: 38)*	Continuous development	86	*"never stand still", "challenge both us and the students constantly"*
	Positive starting point	78	*"high ability to look for right in each other, instead of wrong", "only positivity"*
	Open sharing / transparency	46	*"we share ideas and material", "we dare to be open", "without prestige"*
	Learning organisation	41	*"systematic competence development", "shared", "evaluation and follow-up"*
	Innovation / think differently	40	*"dare to test new things, sometimes fail", "think anew", "innovative solutions"*
	Reflection	20	*"constantly reflect", "individually and in groups", "set aside time"*
	Continuous experimentation	18	*"test, try and explore", "feel free to experiment", "try and retry"*
	Comparing one's teaching	8	*"challenge each other", "compare ourselves with others", "see other teachers"*
	Scientific grounding	7	*"test the latest research", "organization Frida has built up with researchers"*

Table 4. *Verbatim quotes from respondents on how Frida Education works differently – entrepreneurially – compared to other school organisations.*

Dimension *See further Table 1*	**Frida Education as entrepreneurial** *Links to code phrases in Table 3 are in **italic bold***	**Illustrations by respondents of how Frida Education works differently**	**Illustrations by respondents of how they perceive that many others work**
Redirection power	Staff experience ***trust***, ***freedom with responsibility*** and ***influence***. The ***flat structures*** enable ***innovation*** and ***flexibility***.	*"staff have a strong mandate", "a large degree of freedom", "development areas come 'from below'", "idea in the morning can be realized after lunch"*	*"very controlled from above, by politicians", "most decisions were made by management", "clear rights and wrongs", "teachers received instructions"*
Opportunity orientation	A ***strength-based*** and ***positive starting point*** permeates culture. Staff ***praise*** what works, ***celebrate successes***, creating ***positive*** spirals.	*"we focus on the positive (like the beautiful fish)", "talk about what is positive … a positive spiral", "look for good things", "strengths and abilities"*	*"you end up in a negative spiral … difficult to turn around", "complaining meetings … 'what should we complain about today'", "distrust of students"*
Novel value creation for others	The ***vision*** to educate ***rail-backpackers*** drives ***continuous development. Innovation*** triggered through ***high expectations*** and ***freedom***.	*"always trying to find tools to make progress", "we try new things even though the shoe … pinches" "expected to be an active part of development"*	*"you work on as you always have done", "half-hearted … development", "Development meetings that only dealt with performance, grades and possible failures"*
Knowledge expansion and learning	Frida functions as a ***learning organization*** with ***reflection*** built into routines. ***Continuous development*** is paired with ***open sharing*** and ***transparency*** across ***strong teams***.	*"constantly reflect on their teaching", "make loops, double loops"," an entire organization that does it together", "a 'learning organization'", "never been more challenged in my professional role"*	*"islands of school development", "many work with 'closed' classrooms", "pedagogues received instructions and guidelines to follow without much room for their own initiatives"*
Iterative experimentation	***Continuous experimentation*** is normalized through ***flexible*** structures. Staff have ***freedom*** to try, ***innovate,*** fail and explore ***differently***.	*"dare to test things …, change again (double loop) … wow this turned out really good!", "freedom to experiment and develop new ways of working"*	*"the schedule … central and most important thing, which has led to everyday life becoming a bit 'rigid'", "goals we were assigned", "experienced as 'locked'"*
Uncertainty management	***Systems thinking*** with ***flexibility*** allow staff to quickly respond to emerging needs. ***Practice-near leaders*** enable staff to navigate uncertainty.	*"We don't need to wait for an okay … we can go ahead", "Not everyone needs to do things the same way", "we can adapt schedules"*	*"Teachers … bound to specific, centrally decided pedagogical methods", "teachers received instructions and guidelines to follow without much room"*
Personal interactions	***Systems*** based ***greeting*** rituals and emphasis on ***relations*** create ***joy at work***. ***Engagement*** flourishes through shared ***food***, ***open rooms***, and ***relational trust*** across all staff categories.	*"the greeting is a central factor", "much is about our good relational ability", "we are with our students as much as possible even between lessons", "sit down and have lunch and talk"*	*"I have no memory of adults greeting students in the corridors", "Forget that a student would enter the staff room or have a cup of coffee with an adult", "I could get a comment like 'you are not my teacher'"*
Flexible resource management	Strong ***collaboration*** and ***equal worth of all*** enable ***open sharing*** across staff categories. Systems thinking supports ***team***-based ***co-creation*** where all children belong to everyone.	*"We collaborate with all staff at school and help each other, regardless of professional category", "The idea that EVERYONE who works in the building is important I've not experienced before"*	*"all departments were their 'own'", "a difference between people", "a subconscious divide", "we didn't share good examples", "'what's in it for me?' attitude", "closed classrooms", "responsible for my class myself"*
Trustful team collaboration	Strong ***team-***work with collective ***responsibility***, supported by ***familiar feel***. Staff ***celebrate*** through ***praise conversations*** and ***positive gossip***, creating ***joy at work*** and ***engagement***.	*"We take care of each other", " I'm never alone, I collaborate with teachers, students and parents", "The we-feeling", "The compliments flow", "everyone at school rallied and supported me"*	*"People don't collaborate, don't solve conflicts together but try themselves", "I have felt alone", "they hold onto their ideas and knowledge to shine themselves", "more 'my' and 'your' children", "'don't touch my lessons'"*

After having conducted the deductive analysis, we noticed that links to Table 3 in Table 4 draw primarily from *Organisational ideas*, *View of humans*, *Workplace culture*, *Leadership culture* and *Development culture*, while *View of knowledge* and *Education culture* are largely absent. It is as if employees at Frida Education are substantially more entrepreneurial than their students. We return to this pattern in section 5.4.

While largely absent, two of the 100 respondents did mention "entrepreneurial" explicitly:

> *"What is also unique about the Frida schools is the entrepreneurial learning where we want students to have the opportunity to connect real life to the classroom. Entrepreneurial learning gives students the opportunity to adapt their learning according to their interests, grow as good citizens with good conditions to climb and achieve their dreams." (Primary school teacher)*

> *"The entrepreneurial spirit is very strong within Frida. (…) It might actually be the can-do mentality (moreover driven by a higher purpose than doing business and making money) that made Frida come into being in the first place (…) it lives on throughout the entire organization." (School leader)*

5. Discussion

The discussion section interprets the findings through three perspectives. We first reconsider what it means for an organisation to be "entrepreneurial", then relate patterns to Bremer's (2025) *people-positive organising* and Rosa's (2019) *theory of resonance*, before finally reflecting more critically.

5.1 Reframing being "entrepreneurial"

Findings show that Frida Education can be described as entrepreneurial in a broad and institutional sense. All nine entrepreneurial dimensions from Table 1 are clearly visible in everyday structures, leadership practices and cultural norms. Yet, employees rarely use the term entrepreneurial to describe their work. This pattern is thus present in practice, but absent in language. Further, it is not framed as market-oriented, competitive or business-driven, but as relational and team-based ways to enable human growth.

One way of understanding this is to move beneath the label "entrepreneurial" and consider what the nine dimensions fundamentally express, see Table 5. Across the data, the studied organisation consistently mobilises and nurtures core human capacities (cf. Berg, 2005; Harari, 2014), such as handiness (Ambrose, 2001), social ability (Tomasello, 2014), collaboration (Puranam, 2024) and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). These capacities are not unique to entrepreneurs – they are species-typical features of human social life, of *homo sapiens*. What distinguishes Frida Education is not that these capacities exist in employees, but that they are systematically organised, legitimised and sustained at an institutional level. Prosocial behaviour is expected. Experimentation is normalised. Reflective learning is embedded. Collaboration is structurally enabled. In this sense, the organisation does not merely encourage employees to be entrepreneurial, it organises around fundamental human agency.

Table 5. *Core human capacities that can be organised for, empirically inferred from Table 4.*

Humans being…	**…instead of being**	**Entrepreneurial dimension** *(taken from Table 1)*
Passionate	Passive	Redirection power – *our agency nurtures our passion*
Positive	Negative	Opportunity orientation – *we focus on and expand what works*
Developmental	Complacent	Novel value creation for others – *we develop a better future*
Reflective	Routine-based	Knowledge expansion and learning – *we learn continuously*
Pragmatic	Rigid	Iterative experimentation – *we dare to try and see if it works*
Flexible	Controlled	Uncertainty management – *we adapt quickly in agile ways*
Relational	Distanced	Personal interactions – *we act prosocially and with empathy*
Resourceful	Siloed	Flexible resource management – *we use what we have*
Collaborative	Individualistic	Trustful team collaboration – *we work together, not alone*

If what we observe here is less about markets and more about organised human agency, what should we call it? Broad and narrow interpretations of entrepreneurship have caused so much confusion that some say e-words such as "entrepreneurial" or "enterprising" should be dropped altogether (Bridge, 2017; Seeber, 2021). At Frida Education they instead label it *educating rail-backpackers*. This indicates that the difficulty may be semantic as much as structural. We seem to lack a neutral language in education, perhaps also in organisations more broadly, for organising around the nine human capacities shown in Table 5. As one respondent notes:

> *"one can feel a bit dismayed that trust and faith in all people's ability to influence and contribute … constitutes a difference at all. Surely that should apply to ALL schools in the highest degree?"*

One way forward could be to label it *people-positive organising*, to which we now come.

5.2 A people-positive logic instead of a market logic

The pattern described above resonates strongly with what Bremer (2025) calls *people-positive organising*. Drawing on for example Selznick's (1994) view of institutions as moral communities, Puranam's (2024) call to build human-centric organisations, Follett's (1941/1977) thinking around relational coordination of people and Laloux' (2014) description of self-managing and purpose-driven "teal" organisations, Bremer argues that some organisations systematically design structures, norms and leadership practices to enable human potential rather than to constrain it. People-positive organising shifts attention from control, compliance and instrumental efficiency toward trust, relations, shared responsibility and cultivation of human capability. It represents a move away from bureaucracy and hierarchy towards community and equality (Bremer, 2025, p.22), without compromising on the fundamental job an organisation must perform, that is, dividing the work to be done and coordinating people's efforts (Puranam, 2024).

Bremer's people-centric perspective helps corroborate our claim that entrepreneurial dimensions identified in this study appear not market-oriented but instead human-centric. The nine entrepreneurial dimensions used in our deductive analysis also correspond remarkably well to Puranam's (2024, p.59-63) six dimensions of *organisational context preferences* (OCP) – what the average employee values the most in any organisation regardless of industry. These are autonomy (cf. redirection power), relatedness (cf. personal interactions), competence (cf. knowledge expansion and learning), fairness (cf. trustful team collaboration), purpose (cf. value creation for others) and novelty (cf. novel value creation). Indirectly, this also means that some entrepreneurial dimensions are perhaps less valued by employees, such as uncertainty, flexibility, experimentation and resourcefulness.

Bremer (2025, p.53-56) also proposes *sense-making devices* as an alternative to hierarchy, i.e., cultural tools such as practices, narratives and metaphors used by people to handle complex situations. We see several sense-making devices used at Frida Education, the most frequent is *rail-backpackers*. Other examples are *circle dialogues*, *brag-gossiping*, *shine on people*, *play to each other's best foot* and *beautiful fish* (i.e. the *Whale done* approach by Ken Blanchard, catching people doing things right).

5.3 Emotional resonance instead of alienation

This study has generated rich data on how it feels to work in an entrepreneurial organisation. Many employees feel belonging, autonomy, purpose, joy and meaning. We have linked these feelings to entrepreneurial human qualities such as passion, positivity, relational engagement and collaboration, as shown in Table 4 and 5. These findings closely resemble what sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2019) describes as dispositions that enable resonant relationships to the world. According to Rosa, the quality of human life depends less on the amount of resources people have and more on the quality of their relationships to the world. A good life, in this sense, is one that is rich in resonant experiences (Rosa, 2019, p.451). This occurs when people experience resonant relationships with the world in ways that create engagement, meaning and transformation. In contrast, passivity, rigid routines, distance and individualism (again, see Table 4 and 5) resemble what Rosa (2019, p.184) calls *alienated* or *muted*

relations to the world due to social acceleration and competitive growth pressures, in turn fostering instrumental and time-compressed relations (Rosa, 2019, p.404-424).

Drawing on Rosa's perspective, we see that the value of entrepreneurial organising extends well beyond organisational performance. It supports more resonant relationships between people, thus contributing to a better life for staff and students. This could explain why Frida Education has a low staff turnover and thousands of students seeking admission. Two illustrative quotes:

> *"I can't name a single friend of mine who I think enjoys their work as much as I do (…) I am ridiculously happy to have it so good. I have worked at many 'shit' places" (Administrator)*

> *"a positive school culture, a strong team spirit, and school leaders who care about their teachers (…) is an important reason why it is hard for me to imagine changing workplace" (Teacher)*

5.4 Tensions, boundaries and other limitations

The positive picture presented so far invites a pause for critical reflection. Some respondents touch upon the idea that self-selection mechanisms may have been at play at Frida Education for a long time, resulting in many already entrepreneurial people joining a single organisation. One respondent writes: "*I think that we are people who fit into the Frida system – happy, positive, high work ethic, easygoing".* This raises the question of whether an organisation can be transformed into something resembling Frida Education without spending decades hiring people who fit. Related to this, Bremer (2025, p.27-29) mentions that collectivist and purpose-driven "quasi-religious" organisations sometimes "recruit for homogeneity", engage in disguised subtle affective control and exclude people with deviating opinions. Further research could investigate whether the implications of this study can be meaningfully cultivated within an existing organisation, and if so, what then happens. One respondent claims it can be done: "*people who really did not fit into the 'Frida form' (…) slowly but surely break their previous patterns and values and adapt to our way of working*".

This raises a classic question in EE: are entrepreneurial people born or made? Do inherently entrepreneurial, relational and flexible people simply choose certain sectors and organisations, or can such qualities be cultivated? Increasingly, EE research suggests that they can (Hägg & Gabrielsson, 2019; Nabi et al., 2017). If so, entrepreneurial cultures should be possible to create in any organisation, rather than assuming that some organisations inevitably attract mostly passive or rigid employees.

Institutional context also matters. If we had investigated a factory, a courtroom or a prison, it would perhaps have been more surprising to find a strong focus on relations and a family-like culture. Rosa describes many such institutions as illustrating a "numbness to resonance", contributing to alienation and a cold, unresponsive world (Rosa, 2019, p.397). But we also have numb educational institutions. When Robinson and Aronica (2009, p.230) described a "factory culture" that kills creativity in many schools, it resonated with frustrated educators worldwide. A broad view of being entrepreneurial could act as an antidote to such alienation.

As much as respondents hailed the positive culture at Frida Education, we still need to ask ourselves what a strong emphasis on positivity does to critical thinking. When no-one asks "what should we complain about today" (see Table 4), what happens to our ability to think critically? One respondent positioned such negativity as mainly union based. But do we not have unions to ask management those critical questions that few dare to ask? And when will we talk about all our problems? If an organisation systematically "discriminates" against critical perspectives (see section 4.2.5), what adverse effects may it entail?

Of all themes in the dataset, one of the weakest in coding intensity and participant tagging was educational culture. Even if employees think and act in entrepreneurial ways, it does not guarantee that students do the same. While students at Frida Education experience active learning, individualization and flexible structures, the pedagogical practices described by staff focus on creating conditions for learning rather than on positioning students as entrepreneurial value creators for others. While Frida Education's vision aspires toward such student agency, our data suggest this

remains more aspirational than systematically enacted across the organization. In other words, a strong entrepreneurial culture does not necessarily translate into strong entrepreneurial pedagogy. Students may still experience schooling primarily as recipients rather than as creators of value. Further, since entrepreneurial agency requires time and attention, a strong focus on developing it among teachers may unintentionally limit the space for students to exercise it themselves.

Finally, this study has several methodological limitations. It examines a single organisation, which limits generalisability. Data rely on employees' self-reported reflections, potentially shaped by social desirability or internal narratives. The Appreciative Inquiry design focused participants on what works well, possibly obscuring tension and dysfunction. Only employees' perspectives were captured, excluding students and other stakeholders. Finally, although DAS enabled large-scale reflection data, micro-reflections provide less contextual depth than interviews or ethnographic observation.

6 Concluding implications for research, policy and practice

For *future research* on EE, this study illustrates the need for more research on institutional power. Organisational structures largely determine what gets done in educational institutions, much more so than efforts by individual heroic EE teachers (Elmore, 1996). Relations can also be emphasised more in EE research, as illustrated by Rosa and Endres *(2016, 2022)* work on *pedagogy of resonance,* see also Quidu et al. (2026). Our study shows how resonance as a pedagogical idea is remarkably well aligned with entrepreneurial education, but also how much it is at odds with our rationalist control-oriented and goal-led society. In today's culture of instrumental reason and individualism (Taylor, 1992, p.1-12), entrepreneurial schools may need to establish a parallel entrepreneurial culture and then defend it from external pressures to conform to an economic rationalism-based monoculture (Michaels, 2011, p.128). Our study indicates that systems thinking could be useful in such research (cf. Ackoff, 2006). Future research could also draw on Rosa's (2019) theory of resonance to study links between quality of life and being entrepreneurial.

For *policymakers*, our study concurs with Hämäläinen (2023) to highlight the importance of the school management level. She proposed training for principals, and our study contributes with a detailed account of what such training could include. Our study also illustrates how an excessive policy focus on efficiency, control and rationality could in fact counteract policymakers' efforts to embed EE in educational systems. Also policymakers' emphasis on specialists in EE to help educators could be detrimental to entrepreneurial school cultures, as Puranam (2024, p.112) shows in his work on human-centric organising. When a specialist enters a school organisation, it may threaten teacher agency by making people passive, controlled and distanced (cf. Table 5).

For *practitioners*, this study makes explicit what it means to be an entrepreneurial educational institution. It shows how a whole-school entrepreneurial culture can be created and also provides guidance to principals who want to adopt a more entrepreneurial leadership style. The importance of a common and co-created vision is confirmed, a vision that does not have to include problematic e-words such as "entrepreneurial", "enterprising" or "employable". One could instead emphasise the importance of people trying to remain positive, developmental, reflective, pragmatic, flexible, relational, resourceful and collaborative, as opposed to being passive, negative, complacent, distanced and individualistic. Implications for managers include avoiding too rigid control systems, since they might kill employee passion. A shared vision can replace heroic entrepreneurial school development through innovation "cells" (cf. Kirkley, 2017), to instead re-humanise an organisation with school development based on collective agency. Sense-making devices can also be used as leadership tools.

For *research methodology*, this study illustrates the usefulness of DAS, SSM, micro-reflections and written dialogues for research on organisational culture. DAS-based reflection data is quite different from interview data and survey data, in that it is both mixed (text *and* numbers), deep (considerable insights were shared), eloquent (higher readability than interview data) and time efficient (100 participants shared their deep thoughts). It allowed us to combine an inductive approach

with a large number of respondents. The five questions worked well, they complemented each other in the analysis phase. We belive our methodological approach contributed to a more trustworthy study in terms of credible, transferable and confirmable findings (cf. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, replicating our study is quite straightforward. The same set of reflective questions can be used to invite a different organisation to deep dialogues with little effort.

6. References

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