

The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process: A 10-Stage Model

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship research has produced a wide range of models emphasizing innovation, resources, traits, and execution. However, comparatively little attention has been given to the process through which ventures come into existence when key enabling conditions—resources, legitimacy, and scalability—cannot be assumed in advance. This paper proposes The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process, a ten-stage model that conceptualizes entrepreneurship as a sequence of emergent thresholds rather than a resource-led or trait-based phenomenon. The model traces how ventures evolve from an initial idea through founder energy, commitment, early action, emergent resources, team formation, prototyping, deployment, external acceptance, and eventual scale. A central contribution is the explicit distinction between deployment and acceptance, identifying acceptance as a social–epistemic threshold at which external actors confer legitimacy and viability upon a venture. The paper further examines how advances in artificial intelligence accelerate multiple stages of the process without altering its fundamental structure. By reframing entrepreneurship as emergence rather than execution, the paper offers a general, durable framework applicable across technological and institutional contexts.

Keywords: *entrepreneurship, emergence, venture formation, process theory, acceptance, legitimacy, resources, artificial intelligence*

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has long occupied a central place in economic, managerial, and organizational research, yet persistent disagreement remains regarding what fundamentally drives the formation and survival of new ventures. Classic accounts emphasize innovation and novelty, defining entrepreneurship as the introduction of new combinations that disrupt existing economic structures (Schumpeter, 1934). Subsequent perspectives have expanded this view to encompass opportunity recognition (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), strategic action under uncertainty (Sarasvathy, 2001), and the mobilization of resources, often framing entrepreneurship as the pursuit of opportunity beyond resources currently controlled (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990). Despite these contributions, much of the literature continues to treat key elements of venture formation—capital, teams, legitimacy, and scalability—as implicit or early-stage givens.

This assumption sits uneasily with the lived reality of entrepreneurial activity. Many ventures begin not with resources, established teams, or institutional legitimacy, but with an idea carried by individuals who must act under conditions of uncertainty, scarcity, and incomplete information. In such contexts, resources are not simply deployed; they must be attracted, unlocked, or generated over time. Treating resources as an initial condition risks obscuring the very process through which entrepreneurial ventures come into existence (Baker & Nelson, 2005).

In response to this limitation, a growing body of scholarship has called for a more explicitly process-oriented understanding of entrepreneurship. Rather than asking who entrepreneurs are or what they possess, process approaches focus on how entrepreneurial activity unfolds through sequences of action, interaction, and interpretation (Gartner, 1985; Steyaert,

2007). This shift reframes entrepreneurship not as a static configuration of inputs, but as a dynamic phenomenon shaped by ongoing engagement with an uncertain environment. However, while process perspectives emphasize becoming over being, they often remain underspecified with respect to the ordering of critical moments through which ventures acquire viability and legitimacy.

At the same time, effectuation theory highlights action under uncertainty and the creative use of available means (Sarasvathy, 2001). These perspectives rightly emphasize flexibility, experimentation, and agency, yet they stop short of articulating a clear sequence of thresholds that distinguish mere activity from entrepreneurial emergence. As a result, critical transitions—such as the movement from deployment to external acceptance—are frequently treated as methodological steps rather than as conceptually distinct stages of venture formation.

This paper addresses these gaps by proposing *The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process*, a ten-stage model that conceptualizes entrepreneurship as a sequence of emergent thresholds. The model traces how ventures evolve from an initial idea through founder energy, commitment, early action, emergent resources, team formation, prototyping, deployment, external acceptance, and eventual scale. Central to the framework is the claim that resources, legitimacy, and scalability are outcomes of sustained action and interaction with reality, not prerequisites for entrepreneurial activity. By explicitly distinguishing deployment from acceptance—and by positioning acceptance as a social–epistemic threshold at which an external actor commits to the venture—the model offers a refined account of why many entrepreneurial efforts stall despite technical execution or early exposure.

Furthermore, the framework accommodates contemporary conditions of technological acceleration—particularly advances in artificial intelligence—without being defined by them, preserving its generality across contexts. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 develops a process-based perspective on entrepreneurship that moves beyond resource-centric assumptions. Section 3 reframes entrepreneurial action in terms of thresholds rather than traits. Section 4 introduces the ten-stage model in detail. Section 5 elaborates the role of acceptance as a critical threshold. Section 6 examines how artificial intelligence accelerates entrepreneurial emergence without altering its fundamental structure. Sections 7 and 8 discuss theoretical implications, boundary conditions, and directions for future research.

2. Entrepreneurship Beyond Resources: A Process Perspective

Much of the entrepreneurship literature has been shaped by assumptions inherited from economics and strategic management, where resources, capabilities, and assets serve as primary explanatory variables. The resource-based view of the firm, which emphasizes valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources as sources of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991), has been particularly influential. Within this tradition, entrepreneurial activity is frequently analyzed in terms of how individuals or firms deploy existing resources to identify opportunities and generate advantage. While such perspectives offer valuable insights into later stages of firm development, they provide a limited account of how ventures come into existence in the first place (Alvarez & Barney, 2007).

Resource-based approaches tend to presuppose what they seek to explain. By focusing on the effective use of capital, knowledge, or capabilities, they often obscure the prior question of how these resources are acquired, mobilized, or rendered available under conditions of uncertainty. For many entrepreneurial ventures, especially in their formative stages, resources are not stable inputs but uncertain outcomes. Baker and Nelson (2005) have shown how entrepreneurs frequently create something from nothing through bricolage—improvising with whatever resources are at hand. Penrose (1959) similarly observed that the productive potential of resources depends on the services founders extract from them, not on the resources themselves. Treating resources as given risks reifying success *ex post* and overlooking the fragile, contingent processes through which ventures initially emerge.

In response to these limitations, scholars have increasingly emphasized entrepreneurship as a process rather than a static configuration of traits or assets. From this perspective, entrepreneurship is understood as an unfolding sequence of actions, interactions, and

interpretations through which opportunities are enacted over time (Gartner, 1985). Process-oriented approaches shift attention toward what entrepreneurs do and how their actions interact with evolving contexts (Steyaert, 2007; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). This reframes entrepreneurship as a dynamic phenomenon shaped by feedback, learning, and adaptation rather than by fixed endowments.

However, while process perspectives offer a more realistic account of entrepreneurial activity, they often remain conceptually underdeveloped with respect to temporal ordering. Many process accounts emphasize change and becoming, yet stop short of specifying the critical moments through which entrepreneurial efforts cross from intention to viability. Key transitions—such as the movement from individual action to collective engagement, or from exposure to external commitment—are frequently treated as emergent without sufficient theoretical articulation.

Effectuation theory has contributed significantly to this space by highlighting how entrepreneurs begin with available means and iteratively shape goals through interaction with stakeholders (Sarasvathy, 2001). This approach underscores agency, experimentation, and non-predictive control, offering a powerful corrective to overly deterministic models. Yet effectuation focuses primarily on how action unfolds rather than on when particular transitions are crossed. The distinction between acting, being noticed, and being accepted is often collapsed into a continuous flow of activity. One might argue that effectuation's principles—the bird-in-hand, crazy quilt, and affordable loss—already capture elements of what this paper terms energy, commitment, and team formation. However, effectuation describes the logic of action under uncertainty without specifying a sequence of qualitatively distinct thresholds. A founder following effectual logic may act resourcefully and persistently yet never cross from deployment

to acceptance. The present framework adds precisely this: an account of when entrepreneurial efforts change in kind, not merely in degree.

The absence of explicit thresholds has important implications. Without a clear articulation of the stages through which ventures acquire resources, legitimacy, and scalability, it becomes difficult to explain why many entrepreneurial initiatives remain active yet fail to progress. A purely descriptive process account risks mistaking movement for emergence. This paper builds on the process tradition while addressing this gap by introducing a threshold-based perspective on entrepreneurial activity, conceptualizing venture formation as a sequence of emergent thresholds each of which enables the next phase of development.

3. From Traits to Thresholds: Reframing Entrepreneurial Action

A substantial portion of entrepreneurship research has sought to explain outcomes by reference to individual characteristics. Traits such as risk tolerance, need for achievement, locus of control, and self-efficacy have been extensively examined as predictors of entrepreneurial behavior and success (McClelland, 1961; Rotter, 1966). While this line of inquiry has generated valuable insights into entrepreneurial cognition and motivation, it has struggled to produce consistent explanatory power at the level of venture formation and survival (Shane, 2003; Gartner, 1988).

One limitation of trait-based approaches lies in their analytical focus. Traits describe relatively stable attributes of individuals, yet entrepreneurship is not reducible to individual disposition alone. Ventures are collective, situated, and temporally extended phenomena. A founder may possess strong entrepreneurial traits without ever bringing a venture into existence, while others with modest or unremarkable traits may succeed through persistence, timing, or contextual alignment. As a result, trait explanations often account for who entrepreneurs are more effectively than how ventures emerge.

Moreover, trait-based accounts face difficulty in explaining variance across time and context. Entrepreneurial behavior frequently changes as circumstances evolve, resources appear or disappear, and external constraints shift. Stable traits cannot easily account for why entrepreneurial action intensifies, stalls, or transforms in response to feedback. Even constructs such as self-efficacy, while dynamically shaped through experience (Bandura, 1997), are better suited to explaining motivation and persistence than the structural progression of venture formation. Related constructs such as grit—sustained passion and perseverance toward long-term

goals (Duckworth et al., 2007)—capture individual endurance but do not address the qualitative transitions through which ventures acquire social standing.

In response to these limitations, scholars have emphasized action-oriented and interactional perspectives. Entrepreneurship has been reconceptualized as a pattern of doing rather than being, with attention directed toward how individuals enact opportunities through engagement with uncertain environments (Gartner, 1988; Weick, 1995). This shift usefully redirects analysis toward observable processes. However, without additional conceptual specification, action-oriented approaches risk remaining descriptively rich but analytically thin.

What is often missing from both trait-based and action-oriented perspectives is a clear account of thresholds—moments at which entrepreneurial efforts qualitatively change in kind rather than merely in degree. Thresholds mark transitions from possibility to actuality, from internal intention to external recognition, and from isolated effort to collective commitment. Crossing a threshold is not simply a matter of doing more; it involves a change in the status of the venture itself.

From this perspective, entrepreneurial action is best understood not as a continuous accumulation of effort, but as a sequence of threshold crossings. Early action may signal seriousness without securing resources; deployment may expose an artifact to the world without generating commitment; sustained activity may persist indefinitely without achieving acceptance. Each of these moments reflects a different ontological status of the venture, even when outward activity appears similar.

This reframing helps clarify why entrepreneurial persistence alone does not guarantee progress. Commitment and effort are necessary conditions, but they are not sufficient to move a

venture forward unless they result in the crossing of specific thresholds. A venture that remains perpetually in motion without crossing new thresholds may be active yet non-emergent. In this sense, entrepreneurship involves not only endurance but also transformation—each stage enabling possibilities that were previously unavailable.

The threshold-based perspective advanced here therefore complements, rather than replaces, insights from trait and action theories. Individual characteristics may influence the likelihood that founders initiate action or persist under uncertainty, but they do not determine whether critical thresholds are crossed. By shifting focus from personal attributes to the sequence of transitions through which ventures acquire resources, legitimacy, and scalability, the threshold perspective offers a more precise account of entrepreneurial emergence. This reframing sets the stage for the model introduced in the following section.

4. The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process: A 10-Stage Model

This section introduces the *Entrepreneurial Emergence Process*, a ten-stage model that conceptualizes entrepreneurship as a sequence of emergent thresholds through which ventures progressively come into existence. Unlike models that assume the early availability of capital, teams, or legitimacy, this framework treats such elements as outcomes that arise through sustained action and interaction with reality. The model is explicitly processual and sequential: each stage enables the next, while the absence or failure of a stage constrains further emergence.

4.1 Overview of the Model

At its core, the Entrepreneurial Emergence Process rests on three foundational claims. First, entrepreneurship unfolds over time as a process of becoming, not as the execution of a predefined plan. Second, the process is structured by thresholds, not merely by effort; progress depends on crossing qualitatively distinct transitions rather than accumulating actions. Third, key elements often treated as inputs—resources, teams, scalability—are better understood as emergent conditions that arise only after earlier thresholds have been crossed.

These claims are not merely organizational; they are generative. Existing theories treat resources, legitimacy, and teams as analytically independent variables whose presence or absence explains venture outcomes. The present framework, by contrast, derives their availability from a prior sequence of threshold crossings. This reordering generates explanatory claims that no existing theory produces independently. It explains, for instance, why two ventures with identical resource endowments may diverge—one having attracted resources through prior action (Stage 5 following Stages 2–4), the other having received them exogenously—because the processual history that produced the resources shapes the venture’s capacity to cross subsequent thresholds. It explains why deployment without acceptance

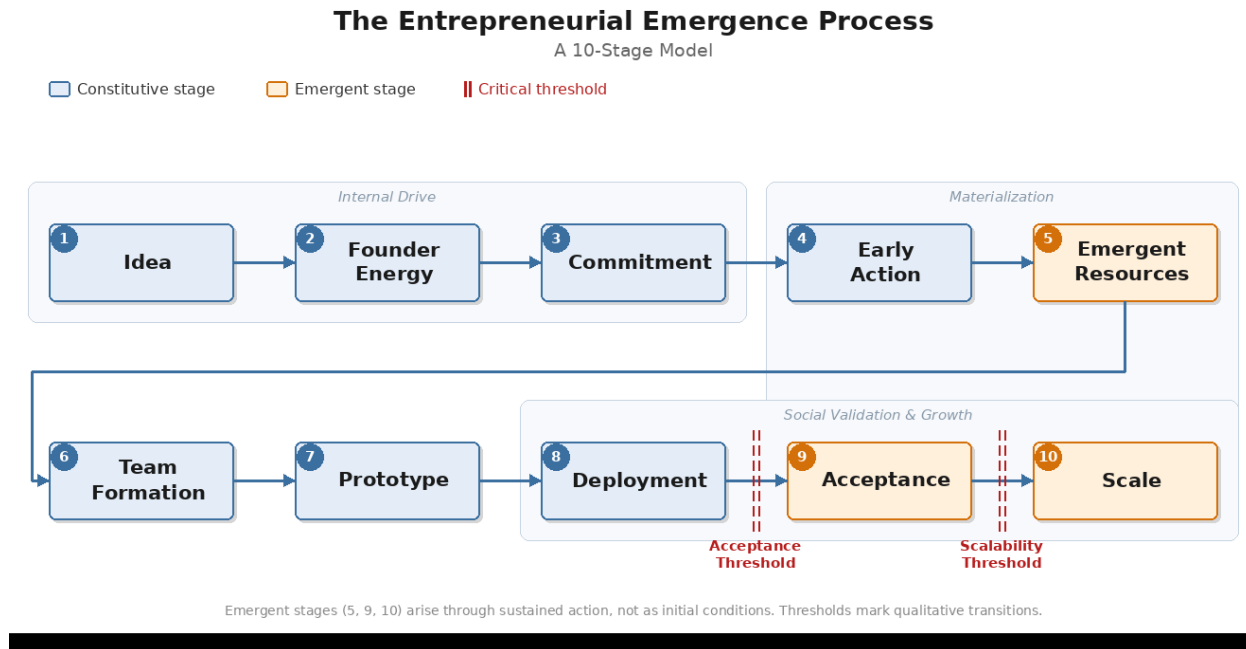
constitutes a structurally different condition from deployment followed by acceptance, even when observable activity appears identical. And it predicts that technological acceleration will increase the volume of deployed ventures without proportionally increasing the rate of acceptance—a claim that neither resource-based, trait-based, nor effectuation theories generate on their own. The model’s contribution thus lies not in assembling known constructs, but in specifying the temporal and conditional relationships among them that produce new theoretical entailments.

This perspective builds on process-oriented accounts (Gartner, 1985; Steyaert, 2007) and effectuation theory (Sarasvathy, 2001) while extending them by specifying the ordering and significance of the stages through which ventures acquire viability, legitimacy, and durability. The model does not deny the role of individual agency, opportunity recognition, or experimentation, but situates these within a structured sequence that distinguishes internal motivation from external validation and private action from social recognition.

Figures 1 and 2 present the Entrepreneurial Emergence Process. Figure 1 illustrates the sequential and threshold-based logic of the model, highlighting the critical transition points between deployment and acceptance, and between acceptance and scale. Figure 2 summarizes each stage with its description and type. The stages are not intended as rigid prescriptions, but as analytically distinct moments that clarify how ventures transform over time. Movement is contingent and uncertain; ventures may stall, regress, or exit at any stage. Nevertheless, progression presupposes that the threshold associated with each stage has been crossed.

Figure 1

The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process: Sequential Threshold Logic



Note. Dashed borders denote emergent stages (Stages 5, 9, 10) whose outcomes arise through sustained action rather than as initial conditions. Vertical threshold markers between Stages 8–9 and 9–10 indicate critical transition points. Solid arrows indicate necessary sequential progression.

Figure 2
Summary of the Ten Stages of Entrepreneurial Emergence

Stage	Label	Description	Type
1	Idea	Novel, original, applicable to reality	—
2	Founder Energy	Drive, vitality, willingness to act under uncertainty	—
3	Commitment	Persistence over time; capacity to finish, not just start	—
4	Early Action	First moves; signals of seriousness and feasibility	—
5	Emergent Resources	Capital, access, legitimacy—attracted, not assumed	†
6	Team Formation	Others join what already moves; energy becomes collective	—
7	Prototype	First tangible instantiation of the idea	—
8	Deployment	Exposure to reality: users, friction, feedback	—
9	Acceptance	External commitment conferring legitimacy and viability	†
10	Scale	Replication, expansion, systematization	†

Note. † = emergent stage (outcome arises through process, not presupposition). — = constitutive stage (enacted through founder or collective agency).

The process begins with an initial idea (Stage 1), whose novelty and applicability motivate founder energy (Stage 2) and sustained commitment (Stage 3). These internal conditions translate into early action (Stage 4), generating signals of seriousness and feasibility. The model positions resources as an emergent outcome (Stage 5), arising in response to visible effort and early execution rather than as a given (Baker & Nelson, 2005). As resources accumulate, team formation becomes possible (Stage 6), enabling the development of a prototype (Stage 7). The prototype is then deployed into real-world contexts (Stage 8), encountering users, institutions, and constraints. Crucially, the model distinguishes deployment from acceptance (Stage 9), identifying acceptance as a social–epistemic threshold at which an external actor commits to the venture, thereby conferring legitimacy and viability (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Suchman, 1995). Only after this threshold is crossed does scaling become feasible (Stage 10), allowing the venture to replicate and expand. The model is most applicable to opportunity-driven ventures operating under conditions of uncertainty, where resources, legitimacy, and scalability cannot be assumed in advance.

4.2 The Ten Stages of Entrepreneurial Emergence

Stage 1: Idea. The process begins with an idea perceived as novel, meaningful, or potentially valuable. At this stage, the idea is often incomplete or weakly articulated. Its significance lies not in its clarity, but in its capacity to motivate action. Innovation has long been recognized as central to entrepreneurship (Schumpeter, 1934; Drucker, 1985), yet the model treats the idea as a starting point rather than a determinant of success.

Stage 2: Founder Energy. The emergence of founder energy marks the transition from ideation to mobilization. Energy refers to the drive, vitality, and willingness to act under uncertainty, prior to guarantees of success or support. This construct captures a dimension often implicit in the literature—frequently subsumed under intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1997) or passion (Cardon et al., 2009)—but rarely theorized as a distinct, pre-resource catalytic force. Energy is not reducible to personality traits; it is situational, directional, and oriented toward action.

Stage 3: Commitment. Commitment reflects the decision to persist over time despite uncertainty, setbacks, and incomplete information. Whereas energy enables initiation, commitment sustains continuity. This stage distinguishes fleeting enthusiasm from enduring engagement and aligns with psychological accounts of agency and perseverance (Bandura, 1997; Duckworth et al., 2007), while emphasizing their processual role in venture formation rather than their status as individual traits.

Stage 4: Early Action. Early action translates internal motivation into observable behavior. This may include experimentation, outreach, or the creation of preliminary artifacts. Early action signals seriousness to both the founder and external observers, yet it does not in itself secure resources or legitimacy. Importantly, activity at this stage may be intense without producing emergence if subsequent thresholds are not crossed—a distinction that separates the present framework from purely action-based accounts.

Stage 5: Emergent Resources. Resources appear at this stage not as initial inputs, but as responses to sustained action and visible commitment. Capital, expertise, access, and legitimacy are attracted, unlocked, or assembled as a consequence of prior engagement. This reordering

challenges resource-based assumptions (Barney, 1991) and aligns with empirical observations of entrepreneurial bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005), showing how resources become available through process rather than presupposition.

Stage 6: Team Formation. As resources emerge, the possibility of collective engagement arises. Team formation reflects a shift from individual effort to shared responsibility and coordination. Research on founding teams emphasizes the importance of adaptive, fast-learning configurations (Eisenhardt & Schoonhoven, 1990). The present model situates team formation after energy and commitment, reflecting the empirical observation that people join ventures that already exhibit momentum and direction.

Stage 7: Prototype. The prototype constitutes the first tangible instantiation of the idea. It renders the venture testable, discussable, and criticizable. Prototyping aligns with iterative approaches to entrepreneurship (Ries, 2011), yet here it is situated as a distinct threshold—a moment at which the idea becomes materially real—rather than a continuous activity.

Stage 8: Deployment. Deployment exposes the prototype to real-world contexts, users, or institutions. It marks a shift from internal development to external encounter (Blank, 2013). At this stage, ventures confront friction, constraints, and feedback, but deployment alone does not guarantee recognition or commitment.

Stage 9: Acceptance. Acceptance represents a critical and under-theorized threshold. It occurs when an external actor—a customer, partner, or institution—commits to the venture in a way that confers legitimacy and viability. This commitment transforms an internal project into a socially recognized reality. Acceptance draws on and extends the organizational legitimacy

literature (Suchman, 1995; Aldrich & Fiol, 1994), reframing legitimacy not as a background condition but as a threshold that must be actively crossed.

Stage 10: Scale. Scale becomes feasible only after acceptance has been achieved. Scaling involves replication, expansion, and systematization beyond initial conditions. While growth is often treated as synonymous with success, the model emphasizes that scale is an outcome of prior emergence, not a substitute for it.

Taken together, these ten stages articulate entrepreneurship as a process of progressive emergence. Each stage enables new possibilities while constraining others, and failure to cross a threshold limits further development regardless of effort expended. By specifying the sequence through which ventures acquire resources, legitimacy, and scalability, the Entrepreneurial Emergence Process provides a structured yet flexible account of how entrepreneurial activity becomes entrepreneurial reality.

5. Acceptance as a Social–Epistemic Threshold

Among the ten stages of the Entrepreneurial Emergence Process, acceptance occupies a distinctive and pivotal role. While entrepreneurship research has devoted substantial attention to ideation, experimentation, and deployment, the moment at which an entrepreneurial effort becomes recognized and committed to by an external actor has received comparatively little conceptual clarification. Existing work on organizational legitimacy identifies the importance of social approval for new ventures (Suchman, 1995; Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002), yet legitimacy is typically analyzed as a continuous resource to be accumulated rather than as a discrete threshold to be crossed. This paper proposes acceptance as precisely such a threshold.

Acceptance is defined here as the point at which an external party—a customer, partner, investor, or institution—commits to the venture in a manner that confers legitimacy and viability. This commitment may take multiple forms: purchase, adoption, contractual agreement, or institutional approval. What unites these instances is not enthusiasm or interest, but commitment with consequences—a willingness to allocate resources, assume risk, or tie outcomes to the venture’s continuation.

This definition distinguishes acceptance sharply from deployment. Deployment refers to exposing a product, service, or prototype to the world; acceptance refers to the world answering back. A venture may be widely deployed—visible, discussed, or even praised—without being accepted. Conversely, acceptance may occur quietly yet decisively alter the venture’s status. Treating deployment as equivalent to acceptance obscures a crucial explanatory gap in entrepreneurial outcomes.

Existing approaches acknowledge the importance of external feedback. Concepts such as validated learning emphasize experimentation and market response (Ries, 2011), while customer discovery highlights engagement with potential users (Blank, 2013). These contributions have significantly improved entrepreneurial practice, yet they frame acceptance as a methodological checkpoint rather than as a threshold of emergence. In doing so, they risk understating the ontological significance of external commitment. Relatedly, the sociology of valuation literature has shown how the worth of novel offerings is not intrinsic but constituted through social evaluation processes (Lamont, 2012)—a perspective that reinforces the present claim that ventures become real through acceptance, not merely through existence.

The threshold perspective advanced here emphasizes that acceptance changes the status of the venture itself. Prior to acceptance, the venture remains a provisional project sustained primarily by the founder's energy and commitment. After acceptance, it acquires a degree of social reality that exceeds individual intention, becoming embedded in relationships of obligation, expectation, and accountability. This transformation helps explain why acceptance often unlocks access to further resources, facilitates team consolidation, and enables scaling—outcomes difficult to secure through deployment alone.

Importantly, acceptance is neither binary nor uniform. Degrees of acceptance may vary across actors and contexts, and early acceptance does not guarantee durability. Nevertheless, crossing an acceptance threshold marks a qualitative shift in the venture's trajectory—the point at which entrepreneurial efforts begin to transition from experimentation to organization, from possibility to commitment. Failure to cross this threshold explains why many ventures remain indefinitely in a state of activity without emergence.

By conceptualizing acceptance as a social–epistemic threshold, the model clarifies a central but often implicit transition. Acceptance is social because it depends on recognition and commitment by others; it is epistemic because it constitutes a form of external validation that redefines what the venture is. This dual character distinguishes acceptance from internal conviction, technical feasibility, or market exposure alone. Recognizing acceptance as a distinct stage refines process models by identifying a critical transition that cannot be reduced to learning, iteration, or incremental legitimacy accumulation.

6. Entrepreneurial Emergence under AI-Accelerated Conditions

Recent advances in artificial intelligence, particularly large language models and related generative systems, have significantly altered the landscape of entrepreneurial activity. Tasks that once required specialized expertise, financial investment, or coordinated teams—market analysis, content creation, software development, early prototyping—can now be performed at relatively low cost by individual founders (Nambisan, 2017; von Briel et al., 2018). These developments raise an important theoretical question: whether artificial intelligence alters the structure of entrepreneurial emergence itself, or whether it primarily accelerates processes already accounted for within existing frameworks.

The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process adopts the latter position. Rather than treating AI as a redefining feature of entrepreneurship, the model conceptualizes AI as a cross-cutting accelerator that operates across multiple stages while leaving the core thresholds intact. AI modifies the availability, cost, and speed of means without eliminating the fundamental conditions through which ventures come into existence.

At early stages, AI lowers the activation energy required to move from idea to action. During ideation and early action, AI systems can assist in articulating concepts, exploring alternatives, generating artifacts, and simulating scenarios. These capabilities compress the time between intention and execution, enabling faster experimentation. However, such systems do not originate motivation, supply purpose, or sustain commitment. Phenomenological analyses of human–AI collaboration suggest that AI functions as a cognitive amplifier within hybrid systems, extending the reach of human judgment while remaining structurally dependent on human intentionality for direction and evaluative coherence (Matta, 2025b). The emergence of

founder energy and commitment thus remains irreducibly human, even as the cognitive burden of execution is partially externalized.

The impact of AI is particularly visible at the stage of emergent resources. In AI-accelerated contexts, certain resources—analytical capacity, creative output, technical execution—appear quasi-immediate. AI thus functions as a synthetic or proxy resource, substituting in part for capital, labor, or expertise. Importantly, this does not negate the emergent character of resources within the process. The effective use of AI-generated outputs remains conditional on direction, judgment, and sustained engagement—all of which depend on earlier thresholds having been crossed. As Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) have argued, technology amplifies human capabilities without substituting for human judgment in contexts that require adaptability and purpose.

AI also alters the temporal relationship between team formation, prototyping, and deployment. Founders may delay team formation while still producing functional prototypes and deploying early versions of their ideas. This compression allows for faster exposure to feedback, but it does not eliminate the eventual need for coordination, accountability, and shared responsibility. As ventures move toward durability and scale, collective structures reassert their importance.

Crucially, AI does not collapse the acceptance threshold. While AI can generate outputs, optimize workflows, and automate interactions, it cannot confer legitimacy, trust, or commitment. Acceptance—whether expressed through adoption, purchase, partnership, or institutional approval—remains a social and relational event that presupposes an external actor's willingness to bind outcomes to the venture's continuation. This creates a structural asymmetry

under AI-accelerated conditions: AI compresses the stages that are primarily internal and agentic (Stages 1–8), but has no direct effect on the stage that is primarily social and relational (Stage 9). The result is a widening gap between the rate at which ventures reach deployment and the rate at which they achieve acceptance. This asymmetry is not incidental; it follows from the threshold logic of the model. Because acceptance depends on external commitment rather than internal execution, it cannot be accelerated by the same technological means that compress earlier stages. Under AI-accelerated conditions, the deployment–acceptance distinction therefore becomes more salient, not less—revealing acceptance as the binding constraint on entrepreneurial emergence in environments where action is abundant but legitimacy remains scarce.

Similarly, AI-assisted scaling remains constrained by factors exceeding technical replication. Scale presupposes demand, governance, and legitimacy—conditions that depend on sustained acceptance and cannot be substituted by computational capability alone. The proliferation of AI-generated ventures may in fact increase the cognitive and evaluative burden on external actors—investors, customers, institutions—who must allocate attention and commitment across a growing volume of deployed offerings. In this sense, AI acceleration may paradoxically raise the effective threshold for acceptance by intensifying competition for the social and relational resources that acceptance requires. From a theoretical perspective, AI thus serves less as a disruptor of entrepreneurial emergence than as a revealing stress test of its structure, exposing the limits of automation and highlighting the enduring role of energy, commitment, and external validation (Floridi, 2014).

In sum, artificial intelligence accelerates entrepreneurial emergence without redefining it. The structure and sequencing of the model remain invariant, even as the means through which stages are traversed become compressed and reconfigured. This invariance under technological

acceleration reinforces the generality of the framework and underscores its applicability across evolving technological contexts.

7. Discussion: Implications for Entrepreneurship Theory

The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process has several implications for how entrepreneurship is conceptualized, theorized, and studied. By reframing entrepreneurship as a sequence of emergent thresholds, the model clarifies long-standing ambiguities in the literature regarding venture formation, progress, and failure.

7.1 Implications for Resource-Based Views

Resource-based perspectives have been highly influential in entrepreneurship and strategic management, emphasizing how firms deploy valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources to achieve advantage (Barney, 1991; Penrose, 1959). While these perspectives offer powerful tools for explaining competitive dynamics among established firms, they are less well suited to explaining the earliest stages of venture formation. The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process complements resource-based views by addressing the logically prior question of how resources come to be available in the first place (Alvarez & Barney, 2007).

By positioning resources as an emergent stage rather than an initial condition, the model highlights the temporal asymmetry between entrepreneurial action and resource availability. Resources appear as responses to visible commitment, early action, and external recognition. This reordering does not negate the relevance of resource-based explanations; instead, it situates them downstream of emergence, where they are theoretically more appropriate. Whereas resource-based views explain how ventures leverage existing assets to achieve advantage, the present framework addresses how assets, legitimacy, and coordination come into existence when none can be assumed at the outset.

7.2 Implications for Process and Effectuation Theories

Process-oriented approaches have long argued that entrepreneurship should be understood as an unfolding sequence of actions (Gartner, 1985; Steyaert, 2007). Effectuation theory advances this view by emphasizing action under uncertainty and the creative use of available means (Sarasvathy, 2001). The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process aligns closely with these perspectives in its emphasis on action and contingency.

However, the model extends existing process accounts by introducing explicit thresholds that structure entrepreneurial becoming. Rather than treating entrepreneurial activity as a continuous flow, the framework identifies moments at which ventures qualitatively change in status. This distinction adds temporal resolution to process theories and clarifies why sustained activity does not always result in emergence. The model bridges descriptive accounts of entrepreneurial action with a more analytically precise account of progression, specifying what effectuation's logic of action leaves indeterminate: the critical transition points at which ventures acquire social standing.

7.3 Reconsidering Failure, Persistence, and Progress

A threshold-based view also reframes how failure and persistence are understood. Traditional accounts often interpret failure as the absence of success or the exhaustion of resources. Within the Entrepreneurial Emergence Process, failure can be understood as the inability to cross specific thresholds, regardless of effort or persistence. Ventures may fail not because founders lack motivation, but because acceptance is never secured, resources do not emerge, or collective structures are not formed.

This perspective explains why persistence alone is an unreliable predictor of success. Commitment and endurance are necessary for emergence, but insufficient without corresponding

transformations in the venture's status. Progress, on this account, is measured not by activity levels or iteration counts, but by whether new thresholds have been crossed—a distinction with important implications for how entrepreneurial trajectories are interpreted in both research and practice.

7.4 Implications under Technological Acceleration

The analysis of artificial intelligence in Section 6 further underscores the theoretical value of a threshold-based framework. By lowering the cost of action and compressing early stages, AI increases the volume of entrepreneurial effort without increasing the proportion that achieves acceptance. The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process explains this divergence by showing that technological acceleration affects means, not thresholds. In environments where tools make action abundant, the scarcity shifts to legitimacy, commitment, and coordination—reinforcing the theoretical importance of the thresholds identified in this paper.

Beyond its theoretical implications, the Entrepreneurial Emergence Process also invites a more reflective orientation toward entrepreneurial practice. By foregrounding thresholds rather than activity alone, the model encourages founders, educators, and scholars to attend not merely to speed, iteration, or output, but to the qualitative transitions that signal genuine emergence. Periods of apparent stagnation may be understood not as failure, but as phases in which acceptance, legitimacy, or coordination have not yet been secured. Such an orientation fosters patience, discernment, and attentiveness to context—qualities that remain essential even in technologically accelerated environments.

Taken together, these implications position the Entrepreneurial Emergence Process as a unifying structure that integrates insights from resource-based, process-oriented, and action-based theories while addressing their respective limitations.

8. Boundary Conditions and Future Research

While the Entrepreneurial Emergence Process offers a general framework for understanding venture formation, its applicability is not universal. Like all conceptual models, it is most informative under particular conditions and less explanatory under others. Clarifying these boundary conditions is essential for theoretical precision and for guiding future research.

First, the model is most applicable to opportunity-driven ventures operating under conditions of uncertainty, where resources, legitimacy, and scalability cannot be assumed in advance. This includes a wide range of startups and entrepreneurial initiatives across technological, social, and institutional domains. By contrast, the framework is less directly applicable to inherited ventures, state-backed enterprises, or highly regulated monopolistic contexts, where resources, legitimacy, or market access may be granted *ex ante*, bypassing several stages identified in the model.

Second, the model assumes a degree of founder agency in initiating and sustaining action. Although the framework accommodates collective and distributed forms of entrepreneurship, it presupposes that energy and commitment originate from identifiable actors. Future research could extend the model to examine contexts in which entrepreneurial agency is diffuse, algorithmically mediated, or institutionally embedded, exploring how thresholds are crossed when responsibility and intention are distributed rather than centralized.

Third, while the model emphasizes sequential emergence, it does not claim that entrepreneurial trajectories are linear or irreversible. Threshold regression—the loss of a previously crossed threshold—is a structurally distinct phenomenon from failure to cross a threshold in the first place, and warrants brief theoretical articulation. Regression occurs when

the conditions that sustained a threshold crossing erode: a key team member departs (regression from Stage 6), an early adopter withdraws commitment (regression from Stage 9), or resources that were attracted prove contingent on conditions that no longer hold (regression from Stage 5). Importantly, regression at one stage does not reset the entire sequence; a venture that loses acceptance may retain its prototype, team, and accumulated resources, but finds itself unable to scale until acceptance is re-secured. This suggests that thresholds vary in their reversibility. Early, internally driven stages (energy, commitment, early action) are relatively stable because they depend on founder agency. Later, externally dependent stages (resources, acceptance, scale) are more vulnerable to regression because they depend on the continued engagement of actors whose commitments may be partial, conditional, or time-limited (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). Future empirical work could investigate patterns of threshold regression—which stages regress most frequently, whether regression follows predictable sequences, and how ventures that successfully re-cross a lost threshold differ from those that do not. Longitudinal case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989) and process-tracing methodologies (Langley, 1999) would be particularly well suited to examining these dynamics.

Fourth, the model invites empirical operationalization. While this paper develops the framework at a conceptual level, future studies could operationalize individual stages through observable indicators: founder energy through behavioral measures of initiative and persistence under resource constraints; commitment through longitudinal tracking of effort allocation; emergent resources through the timing and sources of capital inflows relative to action; acceptance through documented instances of external commitment such as first purchase, signed agreements, or institutional endorsement; and scale through expansion metrics following

acceptance events. Comparative case designs and process-tracing methodologies (Langley, 1999) offer promising approaches for testing the model's sequential claims empirically.

The discussion of artificial intelligence also opens several avenues. While AI is treated here as a cross-cutting accelerator, future studies could examine how AI-mediated coordination or legitimacy attribution may reshape specific stages. Research could explore whether new forms of acceptance emerge in digitally mediated environments (Autio et al., 2018), or whether traditional forms of social and institutional commitment remain dominant.

Finally, future theoretical work could integrate the Entrepreneurial Emergence Process with adjacent literatures, including institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995), and the sociology of valuation (Lamont, 2012). Such integrations may deepen understanding of how acceptance is granted, contested, or withdrawn across different social contexts, and how entrepreneurial emergence intersects with broader processes of meaning-making and legitimacy construction.

A further extension concerns the relationship between entrepreneurial emergence and sustainability. Ventures addressing environmental, social, or systemic challenges face the same threshold sequence identified in this paper, yet they may encounter distinctive dynamics at critical stages. Sustainable entrepreneurship often involves longer gestation periods between deployment and acceptance, because the value propositions of sustainability-oriented ventures frequently depend on institutional recognition, policy alignment, or shifts in collective valuation that exceed conventional market feedback (York & Venkataraman, 2010). The acceptance threshold may therefore be particularly demanding for mission-driven ventures, which must secure legitimacy from both market actors and institutional gatekeepers simultaneously. Living

systems approaches to value creation further suggest that sustainability-oriented ventures operate within value ecologies in which resources, legitimacy, and stakeholder commitment co-evolve through dynamic feedback rather than linear accumulation (Matta, 2025a)—a perspective that reinforces the emergent and threshold-based logic of the present model. Conversely, the emergence of resources (Stage 5) may follow different patterns in sustainability contexts, where impact-oriented investors, public funding mechanisms, and ecosystem-level support structures create resource pathways unavailable to purely commercial ventures. The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process, by making these thresholds explicit, offers a structured lens through which the distinctive temporal and legitimacy challenges of sustainable entrepreneurship can be analyzed without requiring a separate theoretical apparatus.

By delineating these boundary conditions and research directions, the present paper aims not to close debate, but to provide a structured foundation upon which further theoretical and empirical inquiry can build.

9. Conclusion

This paper has proposed *The Entrepreneurial Emergence Process*, a ten-stage model that conceptualizes entrepreneurship as a sequence of emergent thresholds through which ventures progressively come into existence. By shifting attention from traits and presumed resources toward process, ordering, and transformation, the model offers a structured account of how entrepreneurial activity becomes entrepreneurial reality.

The central contribution lies in its reordering of foundational assumptions. Rather than treating resources, teams, legitimacy, or scalability as initial conditions, the model demonstrates how these elements arise through sustained energy, commitment, action, and interaction with the environment. Entrepreneurship, on this view, is not defined by what founders possess, but by the thresholds they are able—or unable—to cross over time.

A second contribution is the identification of acceptance as a distinct social–epistemic threshold separating deployment from scale. By clarifying the role of external commitment in venture formation, the model resolves a common ambiguity in entrepreneurship research and practice. Acceptance transforms a private project into a socially sustained reality, enabling access to further resources, coordination, and expansion. Without acceptance, ventures may persist indefinitely without progressing.

The paper also examined conditions of technological acceleration, showing that while advances in artificial intelligence compress timelines and lower the cost of action, they do not alter the fundamental structure of emergence. Energy, commitment, acceptance, and scale remain non-substitutable thresholds. Technological acceleration reinforces rather than undermines the relevance of a threshold-based perspective.

Taken together, the Entrepreneurial Emergence Process provides a general and durable framework for understanding venture formation across contexts. It integrates insights from innovation theory, process perspectives, resource-based views, and action-oriented approaches while addressing their limitations through clearer sequencing and conceptual specification. By foregrounding emergence rather than execution, the model invites renewed attention to how entrepreneurial ventures come into being—and why so many do not.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethics Approval

This study is a scoping review of existing literature and did not involve human participants or the collection of primary data. Ethical approval was therefore not required.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was not applicable to this study.

Author Contributions

The author was solely responsible for the conceptualization of the study, literature search and screening, data extraction and synthesis, analysis and interpretation, and manuscript preparation.

Data Availability

All data used in this study are derived from published sources cited in the reference list.

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Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence tools were used in a limited and supportive role for language editing, grammar checking, and stylistic refinement. No AI system was used to generate original ideas, theoretical arguments, analyses, or conclusions. The author retains full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

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