SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

The paradox of entrepreneurship:

how emplotment of the self provides confirmation in the face of anxiety

MSc Managing People, Knowledge and Change

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Abstract

This study explores how narrative identity construction of young entrepreneurs is influenced through sensemaking processes based on storytelling. In order to do so, this study has been conducted with eleven participants of an entrepreneurial hub. This entrepreneurial hub is actively engaged in training and developing skills of young entrepreneurs. The participants in our study were considered young both in age as well as in terms of experience within entrepreneurship, and therefore provided a suitable scope for this thesis. The research setting was established in cooperation with the municipality and entailed a storytelling workshop for value congruence. Interviews have been conducted with all eleven participants at two different moments in time, both before and after the storytelling workshop in order to obtain rich data and address our research question. To increase our understanding in sensemaking processes, observations were conducted during the workshop. The results of our research show that the entrepreneurs' narrative identity was influenced by both interpersonal as well as intrapersonal sensemaking processes. We argue that sensemaking, amongst others, occurred through four layers which we identified as the entrepreneurial sphere, entrepreneurial hub, teams and the self. Consequently, these sensemaking processes affected the entrepreneurs' (narrative) identity construction.

Keywords: Storytelling, Sensemaking, Narrative Identity Construction, Self Emplotment, Entrepreneurship.

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1. Introduction

In this chapter, we will introduce the topic of our thesis. First, a short overview of the theoretical background will be given, followed by an overview of key concepts used throughout the thesis as well as an outline of our case. Our research objective will be elaborated upon by means of explaining the research gap, delimitations and the formulated research question. Lastly, a disposition is provided which aims to serve as a guideline for readers.

1.1. Introduction to the research topic

Storytelling has become the preferred sensemaking currency in organisational life (Boje, 1991; Brown, Gabriel & Gherardi, 2009). So, when accepting an ontology in which the world is considered to be socially constructed, people make sense through their social interactions (Checkel, 1999). As Brown et al. (2009) identified, not everyone is able to convey a story from which the listeners are able to make sense. Nevertheless, these writers do argue that this skill can be acquired by learning. Especially in the field of entrepreneurship, learning how to convey a story from which listeners are able to make sense appears to be crucial as this field is characterised by its non-linearity and erraticity, still facing a high failure rate among new ventures (Kalyanasundaram, 2018). In order to decrease these failure rates, Kalyanasundaram (2018) states that it is important for entrepreneurs to engage in entrepreneurial learning. Rae and Carswell (2000) argue that one way of entrepreneurial learning may be through storytelling as it benefits problem-solving and effectiveness, while O'Connor (2004) refers to how storytelling might be used for other purposes a well, for example to enhance branding and legitimisation efforts as these two are crucial in the first phase of new venture creation.

In essence, entrepreneurship can be seen as the creation of an organisation (Gartner, 1989) in which individuals detect, evaluate and take advantage of opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). To refer to these organisations in this thesis, we use the terms new venture, startup and first phases of entrepreneurship intertwined. Karp (2006) defines entrepreneurs as the creators of value and meaning around opportunities and claims they do this through ''constructing mental frameworks concerning resources, relationships, and assets needed to engage in entrepreneurial activity'' (p.296). As we take the stance in which people are in a constant process of

sensemaking, action and communication are found to be continuously shaping and reshaping entrepreneurs' identity (Bruner, 1990; Weick, 1995). Self-identity can be described as an understanding of the self with regards to this person's biography (Giddens, 1991). This understanding of the self can be enhanced through life story approaches (Johansson, 2004) or narrative methodology (Rae, 2000), as creating a personal biography involves plotting previous experiences into a personal story, meaning that one makes sense of how self-identity is shaped. Here, we take the standpoint that by doing this, one can engage in constructing one's narrative identity (Watson, 2009).

1.2. Research background

The relationship between storytelling and academia has long been ambiguous, until the twentieth century, when a range of scientific fields expressed a growing interest in stories and storytelling (Gabriel, 2000). Where before stories were perceived as irrelevant within scientific fields, its power was discovered later. As a result, the role of stories came into existence as ''factories of meaning'' due to their potential to construct, transform and sustain meaning from experiences (Gabriel, 2000, p.4). Due to the increased multidisciplinary interest in stories and storytelling, the concept of storytelling has developed into something which can be applied to practically everything and nothing at the same time (Alvesson, 2010). As storytelling in contemporary society is spread over a vast amount of disciplines, we will scope the definition by employing the form of storytelling derived from Gabriel (1995) and Weick (1995), who claim that stories function to attribute meaning to experiences.

In the field of organisational studies, storytelling was also seen as increasingly important. Subsequently, many scholars examined the effect storytelling has both within and on organisations (e.g. Boyce, 1996; Martens, Jennings & Jennings, 2007; Rae & Carswell, 2000; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Vance, 1991), and several writers emphasise how storytelling can trigger and drive organisational change (Adamson, Pine, van Steenhoven & Kroupa, 2006; Driver, 2009; Brown et al., 2009; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Kolb, 2003). Other research examined the role of storytelling in learning (Gray, 2007; Martens & Jennings, 2009; Morgan, Pittenger & McIntyre, 2018; Taylor, Fisher & Dufresne, 2002). Besides

that, the relation of learning and (narrative) identity construction (Illeris, 2014) as well as life stories and its effect on one's identity (Watson, 2009) are relevant to our study, nevertheless, little research has been conducted on this matter related to entrepreneurship.

As we aim to look into the meaning of a storytelling workshop regarding narrative identity construction of young entrepreneurs, our research has a specific scope. When looking at the role of storytelling in entrepreneurship, a vast number of researchers highlight the importance of storytelling in resource acquisition and branding (e.g. Bettiol, di Maria & Finotto, 2012; Carr & Lapp, 2009; Garud, Schild & Lant, 2014b; Manning & Bejarano, 2017; O'Connor, 2004). Nevertheless, little research considered storytelling in relation to entrepreneurial learning (Rae, 2000; Rae & Carswell, 2000; Warren, 2004a) even though both the importance of entrepreneurial learning as well as the role of storytelling have been acknowledged. Especially in the first stages of entrepreneurship, both branding and learning can be considered equally important as entrepreneurial learning is said to influence entrepreneurial performance (Rae & Carswell, 2000) and branding ensures the new venture to stand out (Bettiol et al., 2012). Rae and Carswell (2000) argue that it is important for entrepreneurial performance to understand one's learning events in order to derive meaning from these and enable effective decision making.

When looking at entrepreneurial skills and behaviour, sensemaking has been found to be an important topic among researchers. In this paper, we will adopt the term sensemaking as Weick (1995) refers to it, namely ''the making of sense'' (p.4) of both individual and social activities. We use this definition as it acknowledges the social interactions through which individuals create and shape meaning (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Weick, 1995). To date, some research has been conducted on the sensemaking processes of entrepreneurs (e.g. Hill & Levenhagen, 1995; Nicholson & Anderson, 2005), especially in the envisioning of a new venture and its legitimisation (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010; Garud, Gehman & Giuliani, 2014a; Mitchell, Randolph-Seng & Mitchell, 2011; Wood & McKinley, 2010). As this legitimisation has been proven to be crucial in the survival of new ventures (O'Connor, 2004), it is of importance to gain insight in this process and explore how this can be learned. To summarise, as sensemaking enables the making sense of situations and experiences in life, it increases meaning of situations and events for an individual. Here, we argue that sensemaking can be considered crucial in

entrepreneurial learning through storytelling as it enhances the understanding of oneself through plotting previous experiences in life. Additionally, sensemaking has been found to result in entrepreneurial performance and decision making, as well as increase legitimisation and entrepreneurial effectiveness (Rae & Carswell, 2000). Thus, the importance of the abovementioned made us wonder why, to date, little research has been conducted. Merging topics such as entrepreneurship, storytelling, sensemaking and (narrative) identity construction will therefore provide the foundation for our research as we are trying to gain insight in the meaning of a storytelling workshop for young entrepreneurs on their sensemaking processes and narrative identity construction.

1.3. Research objective

Looking into the development of entrepreneurial learning through storytelling or narrative approaches asks for a different approach towards entrepreneurial learning. However, existing research in the field of entrepreneurial learning is, to date, considered scarce. Moreover, even though entrepreneurial learning is nowadays recognised as important, the role storytelling and/or narratives play in this process has not been taken into consideration adequately yet. Most research on entrepreneurship can be traced back to how legitimisation can be obtained, how storytelling may evolve into storyselling, and how entrepreneurs should use storytelling in branding. However, it should be mentioned that even though obtaining legitimisation is proven to be crucial for startups to survive (O'Connor, 2004), to date, researchers have not succeeded to gain explicit insight in how this exactly can be learned, as there is not one formula for success within entrepreneurship. Because there is no set formula for success, we argue that it is crucial for an entrepreneur to have an understanding of the self to provide direction for a new venture. When consulting the existing literature on this matter, we found that research has addressed the close interaction between learning and identity construction (Illeris, 2014), as well as how life stories may affect one's identity (Watson, 2009) and how identity influences one's sense of direction (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). However, existing research seems to be lacking in how these concepts could be applied to entrepreneurship.

While all of the abovementioned studies have significantly enhanced research in the fields of storytelling, entrepreneurship, identity or sensemaking, and some of them even have succeeded

in combining two or more concepts, a perspective which takes into consideration all of these seems to be missing. Even though a consensus is present among writers that recognise the importance of topics such as storytelling and identity construction through social interactions, our research aims to enhance the existing literature by bringing the mentioned topics together and gain insight in the sensemaking processes through storytelling and its effect on narrative identity construction of (young) entrepreneurs.

By merging topics from fields such as storytelling, entrepreneurship, sensemaking and identity construction, our aim is to understand how entrepreneurs construct their narrative identity through storytelling. The purpose of this thesis is therefore not to develop any new theories, but to enhance the existing research with new insights in how storytelling may serve as a vehicle for narrative identity construction among (young) entrepreneurs. This implies that we will investigate how, by means of a storytelling workshop, young entrepreneurs reflect on their life experiences and through the exercises in the workshop, increase understanding of their life story and consequently themselves. We feel this increased understanding might contribute to entrepreneurial effectiveness and new venture success. By conducting interviews and observations we aim to collect sufficient and rich data to address the gap in the existing research by bringing together the topics sensemaking, storytelling and narrative identity within entrepreneurship. We aim to do this by answering the following research question:

- How does sensemaking, based on storytelling, influence narrative identity construction of young entrepreneurs?

1.4. Case

The young entrepreneurs that have been selected for our research are small entrepreneurial teams and individuals from Starthub, a Swedish entrepreneurial hub located in Southern Sweden. These entrepreneurs are part of an incubator program and considered to be in the first phase of starting their own company. This entails that all of the selected entrepreneurs are establishing their product and defining their target group. Since 2001, Starthub has been part of the entrepreneurial scene and since then offered over 150 startups the chance to work alongside an appointed business coach and enjoy perks such as trainings and a shared office space through their one-year

program. The entrepreneurial hub describes themselves as a ‘greenhouse for new ideas’ with their main focus on entrepreneurs that are new to the entrepreneurial sphere. These entrepreneurs can either earn a spot in their program through municipality-organised events, or by applying via their website. Most entrepreneurs in the program are university students working part-time on their business idea. A collaboration with Starthub was established through the municipality, who works closely with Starthub on a diverse range of events, such as workshops, pitching competitions and funding initiatives. The reason for the collaboration between the municipality and Starthub is the benefit of extended network both parties gain from collaborating. In this case, a representative of the municipality hosted a workshop on storytelling and values in order to create value congruence for the young entrepreneurs. The aim was to create understanding in the self and others and create an authentic identity in order to increase the chances of success.

1.5. Delimitations

With regards to our thesis, four delimitations have been identified. First, the aim of this thesis is to provide new insights within the fields of storytelling and narrative identity construction, both applied to the field of entrepreneurship. Therefore, we do not question the concepts themselves, but apply them to the field of entrepreneurship and focus on how sensemaking processes developed through using storytelling as a vehicle for conversation, during which young entrepreneurs engaged in learning through storytelling, creating their biography and establishing a narrative identity. Secondly, in line this, we acknowledge that there are many factors influencing sensemaking and narrative identity construction. Nevertheless, in this thesis, we intend to scope these influences to influences within entrepreneurship. Therefore, only factors within this specific case and scope will be elaborated on. Third, during the workshop storytelling was used as a tool by using one’s personal values to trigger sensemaking processes and aimed to enhance value congruence among both team members and customers. Therefore, it is important to recognise that we do not argue that by using this tool value congruence among different levels is created, but that it creates insights in how storytelling could be used to enhance value congruence. This is in line with the motivation of the municipality who was responsible for organising the workshop, as their aim was to achieve value congruence and team alignment. Here we would like to point out that, thus, the aim of the workshop differs from the aim of our research. By knowing one’s personal values and by actively working with the values of those

involved in the entrepreneurial journey, such as team members, customers and stakeholders, it creates a starting point for discussion. Hence, we do not argue that this is the best way to do so, neither do we claim it to be a means to an end. Finally, as we as researchers interpret the different realities of our participants in a certain way, this thesis is our interpretation of our participants' reality. Thus, we would like to acknowledge that we as researchers can be considered as biased as we use our preunderstanding, experiences and knowledge when interpreting others' realities, expressed in this thesis as our understanding of one's reality.

1.6. Disposition

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the theoretical background for this thesis and provides the foundation for the following chapters. Here, key concepts such as storytelling in organisations, storytelling in entrepreneurship, sensemaking and narrative identity will be elaborated upon. Chapter 3 entails the methodological choices we have made to enhance and maximise the results of our thesis. Here, the research context and site will be explained, followed by the research philosophy and approach. Furthermore, the data collection methods are described as well as how the obtained data was analysed. Finally, the limitations of the research design are outlined through a reflexive and critical stance. In chapter 4, the empirical material is presented and discussed. We have presented the empirical material by means of the four levels which were discovered and through which sensemaking affects the narrative identity construction of entrepreneurs. Chapter 5 discusses our findings in relation to the already existing literature and presents a critical view on how these both correlate and differ in certain areas. Finally, chapter 6 summarises our findings and entails an overall conclusion to our thesis. Moreover, it discusses our contribution to the research field and provides opportunities for future research.

2. Literature Review

This chapter provides the theoretical framework that serves as the theoretical foundation. The three main topics discussed are storytelling, sensemaking and narrative identity construction. More specifically, the chapter elaborates on the role and importance of storytelling in organisations and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial sensemaking and the position of narrative identity within entrepreneurship. These topics will be shortly summarised at the end of this chapter.

2.1. Storytelling in organisations

Storytelling can be understood as both an individual as well as a collective activity (Boje, 2001) and plays an important role in (organisational) life (Bietti, Tilston & Bangerter, 2018). According to Lewis (2011), story and storytelling are both cognitive processes as well as products of cognition. In this context, cognitive processes shape the stories, whereas the latter refers to the story as a product of those processes. As stories bear beliefs, values and ideas as well as experience and emotions (Gabriel, 2000; 2015), they are able to influence the reality people perceive to be true (Brown et al., 2009). Stories are recognised as one of the most powerful communication tools, and as a result, they are inherent in organisational life and are often considered to be ‘’vehicles of communication management’’ (Kaye, 1995, p.1) for organisational members.

Gabriel (2000) argues that, even though not all writers are consciously doing this, a distinction should be made in the terms of stories and narratives in order to gain a clear understanding of both terms. Czarniawska (2004) claims that everything can be considered a narrative, but refers to narratives as spoken or written text that give ‘’account of an event/action or series of events/actions [that are] chronologically connected’’ (p.2). She focuses on narratives as purely chronological accounts and argues for stories as emplotted narratives. In line with this, one could argue that, whereas stories can be used to interpret events through meaning and emotion, narratives are factual or descriptive excerpts of these events which hint towards objectivity rather than emotions (Gabriel, 2000). Kearny (2002) notes that narratives itself are both socially constructed as well as the basis for constructing different realities. This implies that narratives

are both results of, as well as means to an end in constructing these different realities. In this thesis, the notion by Gubrium and Holstein (1998) will be adopted which entails that (personal) narratives comprise the interplay of discursive actions and storytelling. Thus, in other words, through storytelling and discursive actions, which are the verbal descriptions of events, narratives are formulated. These narratives can be seen as the sequence of stories which cause the story to be positioned in the correct order. Stories, in turn, bear meaning and emotion and are rather subjective as there are multiple factors that can change the meaning of a story, such as the storyteller, characters, chronicles and plot (Gabriel, 2000). Plots can create different versions of a sequence of events (Sköldberg, 1994), resulting in different stories, and, in turn, shaping these stories into a meaningful whole (Czarniawska, 2004). In this thesis, stories are used to create a personal narrative, thus, plotting oneself and one's experiences through storytelling. Through doing so, a narrative identity can be established (Warren, 2009).

According to Vance (1991), organisational storytelling can occur in two ways. The first is informal and uncoordinated, whereas the second refers to a deliberate and planned tool. In an informal way, storytelling can foster bonds in social units, also within organisations (Bietti et al., 2018). As Boje (1991) found, stories are crucial for employees' worklife as they are effective means in offering relevant and understandable information. Organisational stories as powerful communication tools can be deliberately used by organisational members to enhance communication, socialising and sensemaking purposes (Boje, 1991; Boyce, 1996; Brown et al., 2009), knowledge, learning (Gabriel, 1995; Rhodes & Brown, 2005), new meaning creation, understanding, commitment generation (Brown, 1982 cited in Boyce, 1996), social control, symbolising, identity construction and power (Brown, 2006; Brown et al., 2009; Gabriel, 1995; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Additionally, Vance (1991) argues that storytelling used as a tool has a positive impact on individual learning and organisational performance.

As argued by many writers in the field of storytelling (e.g. Bietti et al., 2018; Boje, 1991; Brown et al., 2009; Gabriel, 2000), storytelling is often considered to be the preferred sensemaking currency in contemporary society, thus, also in organisations. Bietti et al. (2018) state that the ''sensemaking function of storytelling is [the] means by which [its] other functions are realised''

(p.2). Thus, these authors argue that individuals make sense of both ordinary and uncertain situations through communication as this either protects or modifies their world views.

Gabriel (1995) discovered that stories may strengthen one's identity, which is in line with Kearny (2002), who claims that one cannot create a personal identity without stories. Allcorn and Stein (2016) found that storytelling can be used for individuals to understand themselves and to be understood by others, as the first function of storytelling is to stimulate sensemaking (Bietti et al., 2018) through which people create a sense of who they are. It is an individual's history, persona and identity which make up the stories that are being told about oneself and that are being told by others (Baker & Boyle, 2009). Through creation and re-creation, stories become part of one's identity, and in turn, indirectly, of a group's culture. Therefore, it is safe to say that storytelling can be considered ''one of the most human of activities'' (Baker & Boyle 2009, p.80) and a fundamental element of culture (Brown et al., 2009). This is important in an organisation because storytelling influences organisational culture, whether it happens unconsciously or consciously (Boje, 1991), due to its ability to enhance relationships.

The power to co-create meaning is a noteworthy and distinctive characteristic of stories as the way in which these stories are created and re-told by different people in different contexts adds layers and elements to the story being told (Boje, 1991; Boyce, 1996; Gabriel & Connell, 2010). During times of turbulence and change, but also in times of information overload, stories can serve as an effective means of sensemaking (Brown et al., 2009; Gabriel and Connell, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) by enabling people to develop a shared understanding of the circumstances (Morgan et al., 2018). When the right knowledge is shared at the right moment in the right context, stories are even argued to ''economically communicate experience, ideas and emotions and help make sense of potentially perplexing situations'' (Gabriel & Connell, 2010, p.507). This is mainly due to the close connection between change and storytelling as they are both occupied with ''describing, understanding and explaining complicated processes with multiple characters'' (Brown et al., 2009, p.325).

Even though it can be argued that storytelling is interwoven in all aspects of human life, stories also have the power to undermine and destroy the meaning of others (Gabriel, 2000). Through

power struggles, different contexts and grand discourses affecting one's self-esteem, individuals might have a hard time to express their meaning and to be heard (Brown et al., 2009). Their stories might be challenged, rejected or ignored by others (Alvesson, 2010). Bietti et al. (2018) argue that skilled storytellers are likely to use stories to their advantage, transforming them into a persuasive means, when, for example, conveying a message or selling a product.

Listeners, as argued by Boje (1991), are the co-producers of the story that is told and are often overlooked when considering their importance in the exchange of the story. These sensemaking processes work through one's collective and cultural beliefs regarding what can be considered as acceptable truth in one's thought world (Baker & Boyle, 2009). When a listener is able to make sense of the story and fill in the 'gaps between the lines' with their own experiences and demonstrates cues such as head nods, the co-production of a story increases as sensemaking processes take place. Through this bidirectional process, both the teller and listener engage in active construction of meaning-making and co-production of the story told (Boje, 1991). Thus, arguably, both the teller and listener increase their understanding of the story that is told as storytelling is an interactive phenomenon (Baker & Boyle, 2009). According to Morgan et al. (2018), ''listeners provide the context that can impact the level of support experienced by the storyteller'' (p.181). Psychological studies have shown that the relationship between the teller and the listener should however be taken into consideration when attempting to make sense or give sense through a story (McAdams & McLean, 2013). When both parties are in a close relationship, there is a larger chance of engaging in the story and creating a shared memory (McLean & Pasupathi, 2011). Thus, if a story is told to people that are significantly important to one and these people engage in a collective meaning-making process, the individual is more likely to incorporate the story into his or her own view who they are and who they aspire to be (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

2.2. Storytelling in entrepreneurship

In essence, entrepreneurship can be seen as the creation of an organisation (Gartner, 1989) in which individuals detect, evaluate and take advantage of opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). In order to do so, several writers (e.g. Gaglio, 2004; Kaish & Gilad, 1991) argue that entrepreneurs have different behaviours than other people in society. They search for a broader

meaning (Karp, 2006) and dream of things that are still waiting to be invented, take opportunities and attempt to gain market acceptance (Gaglio, 2004). Although there is also research contradicting these labels, we consider them to be an important influence on the perspective of entrepreneurship in contemporary society. Read and Sarasvathy (2005) note that entrepreneurs are seen as ‘’instruments in the birth and growth of firms’’ (p.49). In line with this, Karp (2006, p.292) defines entrepreneurs as ‘’people who change certain conditions in order to create value around perceived opportunities, either within an existing enterprise or as a new venture’’. They do this through ‘’constructing mental frameworks concerning resources, relationships, and assets needed to engage in entrepreneurial activity’’ (Karp, 2006, p.296). In contemporary society, entrepreneurship is considered ‘’a driver for economic change’’ (Warren, 2004, p.3) and has a large impact on the, amongst others, societal, cultural and economic development of countries (Rae, 2000). Steyaert (1988) describes entrepreneurship as ‘’a creative process enacted through everyday practices’’ (p.15). He argues that entrepreneurship is an ongoing process – a journey with surprises and unpredictable patterns, which therefore pursues and creates its own story.

In the tough and unstable environments businesses and entrepreneurs operate in (Kalyanasundaram, 2018), the importance of storytelling has increased as new business ventures and ideas are ‘’constantly exposed to reactions from diverse audiences on both traditional and internet-based platforms’’ (Manning and Bejarano, 2017, p.195). In order to satisfy this increased number of stakeholders through different media, stories and narratives might help to contextualise and attach meaning to entrepreneurial ideas (Garud et al., 2014b; Manning & Bejarano, 2017). Bettiol et al., (2012) claim that entrepreneurs are actively constructing interpretive frameworks, which, when made explicit through discursive practices, attract consumers and stakeholders. In other words, when entrepreneurs are able to convey appealing messages (in the form of a story), this can enhance attraction of stakeholders. Garud et al. (2014a) and Bettiol et al. (2012) take this concept a step further and argue that discursive practices, such as stories, can be used to reach out to stakeholders, help form structures and drive action such as marketing activities. In relation to this, Garud et al. (2014b) even found that entrepreneurial stories can help acquiring resources through setting goals, expectations and conveying value.

When entrepreneurs are able to convey their stories successfully to their external environment, stories can evolve into something which Carr and An (2011) refer to as storyselling. When stories are perceived as legitimate, they can lead to the acquisition of new resources for the organisation (Carr & Lapp, 2009). As West and Anthony (2000) suggest, creating a trance-like state can enhance the receptiveness of listeners. This state is reached when there is a level of trust between the teller and listener, but even more important is whether the listener can make sense of the story being told. That is, if the story is perceived as authentic and relatable. In other words, these stories may become the basis for legitimacy, offering external stakeholders a framework to make sense of the entrepreneurs' actions (O'Connor, 2004; Suchmann, 1995).

Larty and Hamilton (2011) point out it is only since recently that researchers within the fields of entrepreneurship and small business have adopted narratives and its importance (Hamilton, 2006; Johansson, 2004). When entrepreneurs possess the skills, also called narrative competence (O'Connor, 2002), to position themselves as the main character in their own stories, they may increase their credibility and legitimacy with, among others, customers and investors (Garud et al., 2014b). However, this legitimacy is only reached through external validation (Middleton-Stone & Brush, 1996), but to date, little is known about the way legitimacy is acquired (Maclean, Harvey & Chia, 2011). However, Maclean et al. (2011) do argue that in order to acquire this legitimacy, it is crucial to use narratives, which can, in turn, create the image of legitimacy for external stakeholders (Garud et al., 2014b; O'Connor, 2004).

As it is argued that entrepreneurial learning mainly occurs through past experiences (Warren, 2004a), Johansson (2004) argues that the best way to describe these past experiences is through storytelling. As the stories told are lived by the entrepreneurs themselves, they have the power to create a shared understanding among external stakeholders, but also for the entrepreneurs themselves (Rae, 2000). By telling stories in which entrepreneurs play a leading role, they arguably increase their understanding of who they are (Martens & Jennings, 2009). Thus, this implies that when entrepreneurs actively work on their self-identity, this might subsequently drive certain behaviours. In addition to this, Burke (1991) and Marcussen and Lange (2003) claim that one's identity motivates behaviour. This might be derived from the fact that identities are claimed to fulfil one's need for self-confirmation (Swann, Pelham & Krull, 1989).

Through the process of entrepreneurial learning, Rae (2000) claims, entrepreneurs ‘’learn ‘who they can be’, construct stories of ‘who they want to be’ and work towards enacting their storied identity’’ (p.151). This writer also argues that narrative methodology, such as storytelling, can be used to generate new understandings of how entrepreneurial intelligence or skills are developed through learning. Nevertheless, one could say that that it is likely to be beneficial for entrepreneurs to use narrative methodology (Rae, 2000) or life story techniques (Warren, 2004a) in the sensemaking process of entrepreneurs to, among other things, gain insight in learning processes (Cope and Watts, 2000), critical learning events (Deakins & Freel, 1998) or crises (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Since entrepreneurship is characterised as non-linear and erratic, it is crucial to engage in entrepreneurial learning as well as in sensemaking processes, in order to reduce failure rates among startups (Kalayanasundaram, 2018). Looking upon entrepreneurial learning from this way, learning can be considered *becoming* as entrepreneurs actively construct their prospective reality. Thus, one could argue that entrepreneurs learn through narrative methodology and make sense of unpredicted or non-routine events through storytelling (Bietti et al., 2018). Hence, they learn from previous experiences which enable them to use their obtained knowledge in the future.

Scott and Bruce (1987) found that during the early stages of a business, the main values driving the company and providing direction (Churchill & Lewis, 1983) are often those of the founding entrepreneur(s). Thus, it is of importance for these entrepreneurs to have a sense of identity and direction. Several authors (Bala Subrahmanya, 2017; Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Kalyanasundaram, 2018; Politis & Gabrielsson, 2009; Scott & Bruce, 1987) identify the importance of this first stage during which the focus on creating a commercially viable product or service is high. This stage is followed by the second step, which consists of attracting one’s target group. Politis and Gabrielsson (2009) also stress the importance of a suitable business concept and Kalyanasundaram (2018) notes that marketing efforts are crucial for brand and awareness creation. Additionally, Steyaert (2007) noticed that entrepreneurs rely on relations and networks to acquire resources in the first stages instead of being entrepreneurial individuals. As entrepreneurs in the early phases of their business find themselves in networks (Steyaert, 2007), this layer has a shaping effect regarding (deeper) learning. Gibb (1997) refers to both

transactional and other (informal) relationships. These may constitute of friends, family, acquaintances (Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Scott & Bruce, 1987), customers, suppliers (Cope, 2003), bankers, accountants and authorities (Warren, 2004a). In line with what Gibb (1997) found, namely that both (informal) network members and entrepreneurs learn and develop through these relationships, Warren (2004a, p.14) suggests that these informal relationships as well as formal mentoring might benefit these networks or groups as this enables both actors to meet contemporary needs and anticipate to future challenges or opportunities.

In these networks, Sugiyama (2001) found that transmission of (cultural) information may enhance second-hand experience for peers and younger generations when communicated through storytelling. In this line of thinking, Bietti et al. (2018) comment that it might enhance success of a group, as it influences predictability of future events. According to Brown (2006) and Bietti et al. (2018), storytelling is an important way for small groups to make sense of unexpected events, which often occur within entrepreneurship or organisations. These authors state that this way of making sense often happens through face-to-face storytelling, and that it is often used in the workplace. In addition, Warren (2004a) argues that networks with both formal and informal relationships, mentors or coaches could adopt life story or narrative approaches (Rae, 2000) to engage entrepreneurs in sensemaking and/or critical reflection processes, resulting in deeper learning.

Warren (2004a) and Rae (2000) stress the importance of life story and narrative approaches as these approaches trigger entrepreneurs' sensemaking processes, which in return might trigger critical reflection, stimulating the reconsideration of current thinking and beliefs (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985). According to Cope (2005), these approaches are said to enhance deeper learning. These deeper learning processes takes place when the learner actively participates in the learning process (Cooper, Bottomley and Gordon (2004) as well as when learners are able to link novel ideas to existing cognitive structures (Miley, 2009). Cope (2005) also found that deeper learning often takes place through critical learning events. Engaging in processes of deeper learning (Jones & English, 2004; Miley, 2009), higher level learning (Cope, 2003) (which are considered as similar in this paper) or even transformative learning (Illeris, 2014; Mezirow, 1991) can trigger feelings and emotions (Boud et al., 1985). In other words, when engaging in

reflection and learning from previous events through narrative approaches, emotions might be triggered.

Boud et al. (1985) acknowledge that some, especially deeper, learning processes can become so personal that they influence one's sense of identity, thus has the power to influence the lives of individuals significantly. Thus, not only does engaging in deeper learning through narrative approaches make entrepreneurs link novel ideas to existing structures (Miley, 2009), it might also engage the entrepreneurs in reflection processes, consequently new ways of doing (Boud et al., 1985). As Nicholson and Anderson (2005) claim that ''entrepreneurship is about creating new realities; transforming ideas into new ventures, and transposing old ideas into new situations'' (p.154), sensemaking and sensegiving are important in order to transmit these ideas to other stakeholders. Thus, one could say that entrepreneurial learning through storytelling enables entrepreneurs to reflect on previous experience, which in turn, might engage in deeper learning. This deeper learning might, as explained above, influence the identity of these entrepreneurs, enhancing or inhibiting these entrepreneurs in transmitting their ideas to stakeholders. Here, sensemaking is important in order to convey the ideas accordingly.

2.3. Sensemaking through storytelling and narratives

Literally, sensemaking is understood by Weick (1995) as ''the making of sense'' (p.4) of both individual and social activities. It acknowledges the social interactions through which individuals create and shape meaning (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Weick, 1995). Through these interactions, people attempt to understand matters or incidents that are ''novel, ambiguous, confusing, or in some other way violate expectations'' (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p.75). These authors also claim that sensemaking involves active co-creation of situations individuals try to understand. According to Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) the process of sensemaking is ''ongoing, instrumental, subtle, swift, social and easily taken for granted'' (p.409) and entails the reflexive development of plausible images to make sense of what is happening. Reflexive in this context refers to the bidirectional relationship of making sense, thus, implying that sensemaking is socially constructed. Gioia and Mehra (1996) note that most sensemaking occurs unconsciously through ''assimilation of subtle cues over time'' (p.1229) rather than in a conscious manner. Cues are ''familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what

may be occurring'' (Weick, 1995, p.50). In line with this, Vaara and Monin (2010) argue that sensemaking processes happen continuously and simultaneously. Sensemaking is crucial for the materialising and shaping of meaning through social construction and occurs through using language and communication such as talk (Taylor & van Every, 2000), discussions and gossip (Mills, 2003; Weick et al., 2005). In addition, the use of narratives, stories, discourse and symbols (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Hambrick & Lovelace, 2018; Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2013) such as metaphors (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995; Nicholson & Anderson, 2005) are also found to trigger sensemaking processes.

Sensemaking exists as a cognitive phenomenon and occurs in the minds of individuals. Besides a cognitive definition, which originates from cognitive studies, there is also a more theoretical perspective that is often used in organisational studies (Giuliani, 2016). When looking at the latter, this becomes more complex as here not only individual levels of sensemaking are taken into consideration, but also multiple levels of relational sensemaking in, for example, groups (Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking as cognitive phenomenon is often a tacit and unconscious process occurring in a person's mind (Giuliani, 2016), thus, it can be defined as intrapersonal sensemaking. Weick et al. (2005) and Sonenshein (2007) argue that intrapersonal sensemaking processes often occur unconscious, reflexive and automatic, and in turn influence decision making and action taking. Weick (1995) perceives sensemaking as something we naturally engage in and claims that it influences identity construction and self-perception. He claims that sensemaking is ''an ongoing puzzle undergoing continual redefinition'' (p.20). In addition, Mills (2003) found that meaning created through sensemaking either permeates or constrains the practice of one's identity.

Cornelissen and Clarke (2010) state that sensemaking ''create[s] and [justifies] a rationale for a novel venture'' (p.551). In other words, through sensemaking, entrepreneurs are able to establish and justify their new ventures, both for themselves as well as for their stakeholders. Cornelissen and Clarke (2010) argue that a relationship can be identified between the language and actions of entrepreneurs. Supporting this statement, Mitchell et al. (2011) suggest that entrepreneurs use sensemaking through action-based language to coordinate their thinking processes in social contexts. In line with this, Weick et al. (2005) found that action taking is influenced by

sensemaking which can become a ‘’springboard into action’’ (p.409). Van Lier (2007) argues that in order to give direction to a new venture, it is important for an entrepreneur to create a self-identity. Furthermore, he argues that it is crucial for entrepreneurs to have a sense of one’s position in, and relationship to the world in order to give direction to both themselves and their stakeholders. In line with this, Hill and Levenhagen (1995) argue that entrepreneurs need to gain insight in how their environment works through sensemaking, so they are able to convey their message to others while at the same time gaining advocacy through sensegiving (p.1057).
Sensegiving can be explained as an attempt to control the perceived reality of others (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Steigenberger, 2015). In order to provide direction to other stakeholders, entrepreneurs need to engage in sensebreaking and sensegiving efforts. Although both sensemaking and sensegiving seem to be different processes, the perimeters are permeating each other and cannot exist independently (Rouleau, 2005). Gioia and Thomas (1996) and Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) argue that through sensegiving, certain realities are legitimised over the account of other realities. Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) also stress that sensegiving is not tied to levels or boundaries within organisations, thus implying that everyone can give sense to others. When individuals become aware of the power their stories or narratives possess, this could lead to significant change in organisations (Bushe & Marshak, 2009) or new venture creations (Manning & Bejarano, 2017).

The role of narrative construction is equally important in sensegiving as in sensemaking, and many authors have defined its interchangeability to be crucial (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Dunford & Jones, 2000; Gabriel, 2004; Hambrick & Lovelace, 2018; Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2013; Sonenshein, 2007). When an entrepreneur has made sense of his or her position within a social context, using action-based language might provide the entrepreneur with the ability to stimulate sense breaking and giving for stakeholders. Multiple authors (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2011; Wood & McKinley, 2010) argue that entrepreneurs can use such approaches to be influenced by or to make sense of a situated social context, in order to give sense to the social context in return. Thus, according to these authors, entrepreneurs are able to facilitate collective meaning, or consensus regarding their new venture. Wood and McKinley (2010) suggest that entrepreneurs in this situation are actively shaping their environments due to their ability to make sense of its social structures and processes, and influence the socially

accepted and collectively institutionalised beliefs, thus use sensebreaking to create new opportunities by reaching consensus among stakeholders through sensegiving.

Sensemaking on an interpersonal level, can be addressed as a ‘’way station on the road to a consensually constructed, coordinated system of action’’ (Taylor & van Every, 2000, p.275) or as an ‘’infrastructure of the decision-making process’’ (Giuliani, 2016, p.220). Sensemaking is often used to create meaning in times of uncertainty (Mills, 2003). Consequently, it can be used on an interpersonal level to provide a sense of direction in groups or organisations. Cornelissen (2012) found that the interpersonal sensemaking processes, which are shaped through dialogue, story building, storytelling (Gabriel & Connell, 2010), narratives (Sonenshein, 2010) or argumentation (Green, 2004; Weick, 1995) shape subjective interpretations of reality which in turn influence evaluations of business ideas (Steigenberger, 2015).

To successfully communicate this envisioned future, entrepreneurs need to engage in a sensemaking process first in order to establish an identity and sense of direction. According to Cornelissen and Clarke (2010), the ‘’social context of speaking and interactions with others affecting the construction of meaning about a new venture” (p.542). Wood and Mckinley (2010) argue that entrepreneurs will engage in a sensemaking process to ‘’clarify the viability of the envisioned future’’ (p.68) through interactions with peers. In line with this, Shepherd and Krueger (2002) stress the importance of both team and individual perspectives and its influence on the perception of feasibility for (new) ventures. Other authors claim that networks (de Carolis & Saparito, 2006) and mentorship (Ozgen & Baron, 2007; Wood & McKinley, 2010) affect opportunity identification, thus, are likely influence success (Mitchell et al., 2011; Warren, 2004a).

On an interpersonal level, two dimensions of sensemaking that happen simultaneously can be identified. In groups that need to act in a coordinated way making sense of puzzling information (Steigenberger, 2015), sensemaking could be a challenge (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Taylor & van Every, 2000). According to Gioia and Thomas (1996), individuals in groups create different perspectives of an event, dependent on their role within the group. These individuals develop intrapersonal accounts based on their background and previous experiences, resulting in a

diverse range of accounts within one group (Steigenberger, 2015). Weick et al. (2005) claim that these group accounts in turn emerge from the sensemaking accounts of individuals within the group. These authors also argue that the formation of group accounts is a dialogic process of social meaning construction. In other words, through communication, meaning is created which is in turn expressed through communication. Steigenberger (2015) points out that interpersonal sensemaking is a story building process in which individuals express their opinions. According to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) this can be an attempt to control the ‘’sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward[s] a preferred redefinition of [...] reality’’ (p.442). It is through storytelling, Steigenberger (2015) claims, that people attempt to (re)define reality. In line with this, Taylor and van Every (2000) perceive communication itself as an ongoing sensemaking process. These authors, as well as Weick et al. (2005), claim that situations and organisations are ‘’talked into existence’’ (p.409), providing a symbolic representation of the event, creating the foundation to take appropriate action. Thus, through talking situations into existence, individuals can use their power to shape their own reality as well as those of others. However, this process can be defined as sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) rather than sensemaking, as it might be an attempt to gain power (Steigenberger, 2015).

2.4. Narrative identity and entrepreneurship

As stories and narratives help individuals to understand who they are but also influence how others view them (Martens & Jennings, 2009), they have the power to enhance the (self)identity construction of individuals. In order to establish an entrepreneurial identity, people first need to identify themselves with entrepreneurs before becoming one (Down & Warren, 2008; Hytti, 2005). However, research has shown that this might be more difficult than expected due to historically dominant discourses in the field, such as heroics and masculinity (Drakopoulou, Dodd & Anderson, 2007). It is important to note that roles and narrative identity can be considered both facilitators as well as constraints of identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

Multiple writers (Alvesson et al., 2008; Foss, 2004; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Stewart & McDermott, 2004) imply that personal identity should not be seen as something given and static, but rather as something dynamic and evolving throughout one’s life. These changes might stem

from social experiences and interactions with different groups who possess certain social norms, deviating from the individuals' own (Warren, 2004b). Through a conscious process of self-reflection, individuals can decide whether or not to comply to certain social norms and systems (Foss, 2004), thus, decide whether they identify or dis-identify with those (Czarniawska, 2002). This self-reflection can be achieved through the use of narrative methods in which the individual reflects on previous experiences, plotting these accordingly into a narrative identity. Gergen (1991) argues that the reason for this, is that people establish their identity in relation to their context and their interpersonal relationships, indicating that they may be dependent on the narratives within their networks which they feel match their personal values. By doing this, one's identity is negotiated and re-negotiated, a process acknowledged by Alvesson et al. (2008) as the ''inevitable personal-social relation'' (p.10) to which an individual is tied in society.

Identity construction takes place through two processes which are known as identity work and identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Through identity work and identity regulation, one's self-identity is established. The two processes take place simultaneously, even though they might not always be equally important. Identity work can be understood as the active construction of one's self-identity through which individuals form and strengthen, but also revise and repair their identity in situations which might challenge or threaten their sense of identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Identity regulation however, consists of the ''intentional effects of social practices upon processes of identity construction and reconstruction'' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.265). Therefore, self-identity can be considered a mode of control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) as it is under constant influence of social structures, social contexts and power relations (Alvesson & Due Billing, 2009). While the processes of identity work and identity regulation both influence but are simultaneously being influenced by one's self-identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), it can be understood as ''the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography'' (Giddens, 1991, p.53), and is thus regarded as the image an individual has of him- or herself, ''created and sustained [through] the reflexive activities of the individual'' (Giddens, 1991, p.52). Looking upon self-identity from this point of view, it can be best understood as an ongoing project (Giddens, 1991) and not as an achievement (Watson, 2008).

Suchmann (1995) argues that entrepreneurial stories have the key challenge to establish a unique and legitimate identity in the eyes of the external stakeholders. To do so, Johansson (2004) favours for the life story approach as this approach stresses the identity construction for entrepreneurs. This is in line with O'Connor (2004), who states that a narrative form, such as the life story approach, represents ''an essential logic used by human beings for self-presentation'' (p.109). According to Jones, Latham & Betta (2008), the life story creates ''a person's retrospective report of past experiences and what they mean to a person'' (p.333). This due to the fact that discourses can provide individuals with the needed linguistic resources and concepts during social interactions, which in turn facilitate identity construction in terms of self-understanding, meaning, sensemaking and beliefs (Foss, 2004). However, it should be mentioned that according to McAdams and McLean (2013), the concept of identity as a life story is nowadays regarded as a narrative identity as it implies a ''person's internalised and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future'' (p.233). By doing so, individuals create their narrative identity through past experiences and intended future in such a way that it provides the individual with purpose and meaning. It is through narrative identity, McAdams and McLean (2013) argue, that individuals are able to convey to both themselves and to others who they are as a person, how they established their 'self', and what they aim for in the future. As the narrative identity partially builds on past experiences, it is argued that narrative identity builds gradually over time through the exchange of stories of individuals to and with others (McAdams & McLean, 2013). McLean, Pasupathi & Pals (2007) argue that over time, individuals create stories, which in turn create selves.

Watson (2001) argues that while some discourses may motivate individuals and could be used as resources in one's identity formation, others might constrain as they imply how one should 'behave' or what might be the 'norm' in a certain context. One example of how a discourse might constrain is presented by Down and Warren (2006), who mention the narrative of an entrepreneur as a heroic figure who nowadays has the power to stimulate national economies. In doing so, the meaning of the word entrepreneur might be taken out of its context and so becomes the new commonly accepted definition. As entrepreneurship can be seen as a constant search for meaning (Karp, 2006), the entrepreneur is in a constant conflict between staying true to him- or

herself and staying true to others while being influenced by dominating discourses, which can in turn lead to anxiety.

As narrative identity is argued to be an inherent part of one's life course and aspired future, McAdams (2018) argues that it integrates different elements such as adopted social roles, attitudes and values. Through their socially constructed reality, individuals act according to this understanding, their beliefs, feelings, intuition and aspired future dreams, and through this process, they make entrepreneurship happen (Karp, 2006). Therefore, through the social construction, beliefs, and motivations, values become visible in the actions of entrepreneurs (Barrett, 2007). Barrett (2007) explains that values are the reflection of one's intrinsic motivation, which, he argues, directly reflect an individual's needs. Values can be understood as that what is important to someone – both through individual and collective ways, such as networks or communities (Barrett, 2007). However, as values are universal, they transcend contexts and are applicable to any group or community (Barrett, 2007) but the behaviours which manifest from the importance of certain values to someone are context dependent. As words, and thus values, may bear different meanings for different people in different contexts, there is a thin line between creating understanding or confusion when attempting to express oneself (Gennari, MacDonald, Postle & Seidenberg, 2007). Throughout one's life course, as is argued before, individuals adopt and change their identity due to numerous reasons (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Foss, 2004; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Hence, values change in accordance with changes in identity. In addition, values are considered to be the drivers of one's aspirations and intentions (Barrett, 2007). When individuals are able to satisfy their own needs and work actively on their dreams, they are said to engage in ‘’deeper levels of attention and commitment’’ (Barrett, 2007, p.62).

2.5. Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have looked at how entrepreneurs are said to have the ability to actively construct interpretive frameworks of possibilities and opportunities, which are useful for the direction of the organisation and to attract consumers and stakeholders. To increase levels of survival among startups, it is argued that the main values that drive a business during early stages, which are often those of the founder(s), should be identified and that storytelling is one

possible way to do so. Besides, by using narrative approaches such as life story techniques, entrepreneurs increase their understanding of themselves and may subsequently increase understandings others have of them. These approaches derive from one's past experiences and trigger reflection and sensemaking processes. Through these processes, entrepreneurs arguably actively create and re-create their self-identity. This is viewed as a spiral, as storytelling enhances sensemaking, learning and identity construction, which in turn, is likely to provide a sense of direction. This sense of direction is in turn ''talked into existence'' (Weick et al., 2005, p.409), triggers action and becomes part of one's aspired future. The aspired future in turn is said to influence entrepreneurs' identity, as they are argued to search for a bigger meaning (Karp, 2006). Finally, the influence of social norms is touched upon, and we have elaborated how roles and narrative identity can be considered both facilitators and constraints of identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

3. Methodology

As our study aims to gain understanding in how a storytelling workshop affect sensemaking processes in the narrative identity construction of young entrepreneurs, this chapter will provide the methodological framework we made use of when both collecting and analysing our gathered data. First, the ontological and epistemological considerations will be discussed in order to allow readers to make sense of why specific methods were chosen. Secondly, the research setting will be discussed as well as the chosen methods for data collection. This is followed by the methods section which elaborates upon how the gathered material was analysed and interpreted. Finally, possible limitations will be outlined and reflected upon.

3.1. Research context and site

Since we decided to work within an entrepreneurial setting, we reached out to the municipality as they work closely together with the entrepreneurial hub, which will here be referred to as Starthub. The specific department of the municipality is active within the entrepreneurial scene and is, amongst others, responsible for pitching competitions and funding initiatives for entrepreneurs who are new to the entrepreneurial sphere, as well as offering workshops to enhance their skills on a broad spectrum. In order to obtain our empirical data, the municipality reached out to Starthub, which is responsible for an entrepreneurial incubator program. The

municipality offered the entrepreneurs in the incubator program a workshop on values and storytelling, which accounted for our research setting. In this program, (young) entrepreneurs get the opportunity to work side by side with an appointed business coach to develop their ideas and gain experience in pitching and other relevant facets of entrepreneurship. In this context, the entrepreneurs are considered young both in terms of age and of experience in the entrepreneurial sphere. The incubator program runs for one year, and entrepreneurs either have the possibility to apply for one of the spots or win one during events hosted by the municipality. As most of the workshops organised by Starthub focus on static aspects of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurs were considered to be new to entrepreneurship, this group of participants was considered to gain significant benefits from such a workshop in storytelling.

In total, eleven entrepreneurs between the age of 20-31 participated in de workshop on values and storytelling. From these eleven entrepreneurs, two were independent entrepreneurs whereas the other participants were all part of teams consisting of no more than three members maximum. Within these teams, all entrepreneurs were regarded as either being founding members or members that are partly responsible for founding the startup they belong to, thus, meaning that some of them have joined the startup later in the process of founding the company, but still before an actual product has been developed. The aim of the workshop was to give the entrepreneurs insight in the value and power of storytelling through the use of one's personal values. As the participating entrepreneurs were all considered to be in the starting phase of setting up their entrepreneurial business, which is defined in the theoretical framework as the stage in which entrepreneurs focus on creating a commercially viable product or service (Kalyanasundaram, 2018), the aim of the workshop was to clarify the entrepreneurs' individual values, their team members' values (when applicable), the goal of their startup, and the perceived values of their external stakeholders. This was done through storytelling, in order to consequently enhance value congruence between all factors and create insights in the different perspectives within a team as well as getting a better understanding of oneself.

In order to enhance value congruence between the above-mentioned factors, the workshop was built upon a method that the municipality uses on a regular basis, which in this thesis will be referred to as StoryValue. StoryValue's goal is to give individuals insight in their personal

values, as they argue that these guide priorities and enhance understanding of one's reality. This is done through their online tool in which participants, in this case the entrepreneurs, rank their 'personal values' based on importance. Subsequently, the results of the online value ranking were discussed during the workshop. During the workshop, which lasted approximately five hours, all participants were asked to think of personal stories related to their values, as these would enable them to visualise the values in terms of priorities and behaviours, thus, engaging in sense- and meaning-making processes. This exercise was done within their own team, and in one case together with another (independent) entrepreneur, during which the participants were asked to share their story with their team members, who during that time took on the role of active listener to create a safe and perceptive space to share stories, without interrupting the storytelling entrepreneur.

3.2. Research philosophy

Since our research focuses on the sensemaking processes of young entrepreneurs, it is important to recognise and understand the world-views of ourselves as researchers. These world-views were important to recognise in order to adopt appropriate research methods and traditions for developing insight in the perspectives of the entrepreneurs within our case study. Starting from an ontological perspective which addresses the question whether the studied phenomena only exist objectively or if they are *made real* by the meanings attached to them (Bryman & Bell, 2015), we decided to depart from a social constructionist perspective. The terms social constructivism and social constructionism are often used interchangeably (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Charmaz, 2006; Fletcher, 2006; Young & Collin, 2003), nevertheless both perspectives adopt different lenses. Whereas the former is concerned with how individuals construct their realities through cognitive processes, the latter is concerned with the link between individual constructions and social context (Fletcher, 2006; Harré, 2002).

Due to the fact that our research tries to gain insight in the sensemaking processes during the workshop, which occur through storytelling, we decided to take on a constructionist lens when conducting our research. Harré (2002) notes that using a social constructionist' perspective is appropriate when aiming to gain insight in the ''mental and social lives of human beings'' (p.611). Using this lens also enabled us to view entrepreneurship not as a means to an end, but

allowed us to discover the deeper meanings within social interactions through which the ‘’creation of a living world’’ is established (Steyaert, 2004, p.11). In other words, as we believe that stories are formulated through social constructions, the context in which these stories are constructed and expressed needs to be considered when making an attempt to interpret them. This is of importance because the context is argued to have a co-constructing influence on meaning of the stories expressed (Boje, 1991). Additionally, in our research we feel that these stories could also possibly influence the narrative identity construction.

As we interpret reality as something unstable, dynamic and constructed through social interactions by different actors, this is in line with Karp (2006) and corresponds to the epistemological position of interpretivism (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This position allowed us to view the social world as something in which reality is constructed through human actions and meaning-making (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In addition, as every individual constructs his or her own reality, we follow Foucault (1982) and Rae (2000) and claim that there is no such thing as one truth, but rather multiple (personal) truths that can be expressed through language. As we are looking at the construction of one’s narrative identity through storytelling, which is established in a social context, these truths and meanings are important to consider. In line with this, Young and Collin (2003) note that ‘’language constitutes rather than reflects reality and is a prerequisite for both thought and a form of social action’’ (p.377). Using these ontological and epistemological perspectives, we would like to stress that by conducting this research, we did not aim to claim any substantial truths resulting from our empirical data. Rather, we intended to bring up new perspectives and insights from a different and under-explored point of view, as Gabriel (2000) argues that this allowed us to look for the meaning of experiences rather than the facts. This corresponds with our aim to discover the deeper meaning of sensemaking processes which came into existence through the storytelling workshop.

We would like to stress that often, no clear distinction is made between interpretive and qualitative research (Andrade, 2009). Nevertheless, qualitative research does not necessarily have to be interpretive (Klein & Myers, 1999), but in our case, the research becomes interpretive due to our philosophical assumptions. As interpretive research departs from the assumption that our perception of ‘’reality is gained […] through social constructions such as language,

consciousness, shared meanings […] and other artefacts'' (Klein & Myers, 1991, p.69), it is in line with the philosophical assumptions we, as researchers, have. In interpretive research, social construction of reality is assumed, in which the researcher becomes the vehicle of creating new realities (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001). This implies that by using the lens of the interpretive tradition, we, as researchers, are more likely to increase our understanding in the meaning of the storytelling workshop for the entrepreneurs.

3.3. Research approach

Due to the fact that we intend to investigate personal experiences and meaning of young entrepreneurs' understanding of reality, we will be using the methodology of a case study design to collect empirical data regarding the storytelling event. Through collecting data regarding an event, we gained insight in the sensemaking processes of young entrepreneurs in the local context in which they were created (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). Two sets of interviews were held with all participants; one short interview in an informal setting preceding the workshop and one in-depth interview after the workshop which both consisted of open-ended questions, a method which Scotland (2012) suggests generates qualitative data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative research has the ability to ''preserve chronological flow, [in order for the researcher to] see which events led to which consequences and derive fruitful explanations'' (p.1). This is important as during the interviews after the workshop, interviewees reflected upon their life experiences as well as on the storytelling workshop. By doing so, the chronological flow was of importance for us as researchers to formulate legitimate conclusions from the interviewees' perspectives and discover during which moments in the interviewees' life meaning and narrative identity were constructed.

The method chosen to analyse our data is the interpretive method, as Karp (2006) argues that experience of any reality is only possible through interpretation. In order to create these new realities, we decided to make use of an abductive research approach. The abductive research approach is described by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) as an approach that combines both elements of inductive (start from a theoretical basis) and deductive approaches (does not reject theoretical assumptions) but also takes the understanding of underlying patterns into consideration. The abductive approach indicates a back-and-forth process between the theoretical

concepts and collected data and is of importance in situations that can be defined by uncertainty and complexity (Esposito, Ferilli, Basile & Di Mauro, 2007). Thus, the reason we used this approach in our research was to gain deeper understanding in the underlying patterns during the sensemaking processes of the entrepreneurs. As we were aware that multiple realities and theories exist, we went back and forth between the theory and results in order to find well-grounded results.

3.4. Data collection

Within our study, two sources of qualitative data collection methods were used, encompassing open-ended, semi-structured interviews and observations. The interviews were regarded as main data collection method and functioned to give insight in the thought patterns and reality constructions of the participants (Kvale, 1983). However, to be able to examine the setting in which these new thought patterns may have been constructed, observations during the workshop accounted for complementary data, enhancing the answers and insights which arose during the interviews. As we agreed with Bryman and Bell (2015) and argue that the meaning of reality is socially constructed through social interaction, the observations aimed to discover ‘’the production of social reality from an external perspective’’ (Flick, 2018, p.328).

3.4.1. Interviews

As we were looking into sensemaking and identity processes, which can be regarded as complex topics, it was crucial to obtain a rich set of data. Therefore, two sets of interviews were conducted with the eleven participants of the workshop. Additionally, three in-depth interviews were conducted with both the founder of StoryValue as well as with two business coaches who were working closely with the participants of the workshop which functioned as a frame of reference. According to Prasad (2015), in-depth interviews allowed harmony with our focus on ‘how’ interviewees made sense of specific situations and focused less on ‘what’ was taking place. All interviews are considered to be semi-structured as, according to Bryman and Bell (2015), this structure enabled the interviews to address the most important topics and aspects which were formulated in advance, but allowed the interviews to be considered more of a conversation than a strict question-and-answer structure. This structure also permitted us, as interviewers, to draw in questions that emerged during the interviews, as Alvesson and Deetz

(2000) suggest that semi-structured interviews could possibly enrich the data collection and lead to new insights and understandings. Additionally, the semi-structured approach was chosen in order to capture the ‘’narrative process of [...] sensemaking, and prompting the [participants] to reflect [...] [on] significant periods and events’’ (Rae & Carswell, 2000, p.222). Here, significant events entailed experiences from the past, as well as experiences that stemmed from the storytelling workshop.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face and both of us, as researchers, were present at all interviews in order to capture a broader scope of interpretations of the data. The latter was also important as we adopted different roles during the interviews. While one of us made sure all formulated questions were answered and the participants’ behaviour was observed, the other asked additional questions which could lead to new insights and gave the interview an informal touch. Directly after every interview, we took a few minutes and reflected upon the interview. This was done by writing down important insights, behaviour or other remarkable aspects of the interviewees which could enhance the results of the research and which could easily be forgotten over time, such as hand gestures. We treated the conducting of the interviews – about a workshop on storytelling around personal values of aspiring entrepreneurs – also as storytelling in which both the interviewees as well as the researchers participated. The reason for this was that during the interviews, the entrepreneurs reflected on their narrative identity construction their self emplotment. During these interviews, the interviewees retold the narratives which were established during the workshop, meaning that ‘’the interview itself [became] a site for a narrative production’’ (Czarniawska, 2004, p.50).

Preceding the workshop, a short interview was conducted with all participants which was deliberately held in the informal setting of a small cafe. This first interview lasted between 21-34 minutes per participant and had two purposes. The first was to establish an informal atmosphere, aiming to increase levels of trust among the participants and us as researchers, which is in line with Ulus and Gabriel (2015) who argue that higher levels of trust optimise the sharing of personal experiences and information. Secondly, the short interviews aimed to create a foundation of understanding, or, in other words, a context for the narrative accounts of the entrepreneurs (Warren, 2004a). The participants were asked to tell something about themselves,

their entrepreneurial journey so far, how they established their teams (when applicable), and what their biggest struggles were throughout this process. In order to gain insight in the entrepreneur's narrative accounts, we asked questions regarding their existing knowledge of values, storytelling and whether the participants received any guidance or coaching so far, as well as their expectations for the workshop.

The second set of interviews was conducted within four days after the workshop and lasted between 39-64 minutes per participant. The main goal of these interviews was to gain in-depth knowledge on the entrepreneurs' experiences of the workshop. As the stories during the workshop were personal and involved an emotional dimension, these interviews were deliberately held in a meeting room in order to create a safe space for the participants to talk about their experiences as interruptions or distractions were minimised. To gain insight in the meaning and experiences of the workshop of the participants, we intended to become 'fellow travellers' of the narrative (Gabriel & Ulus, 2015), which is described by Gabriel (2000) as naturally engaging in the conversation while actively acknowledging the emotional and symbolic elements. In order to obtain this information, we asked how the interviewees experienced the storytelling and how it felt to use stories to translate personal values into their startup. This due to the fact that the stories in the workshop functioned as sensemaking device for the entrepreneurs. In addition, they were asked to tell about their insights from the workshop, if they were already aware of their personal values that resulted from the online tool, how they experienced the use of storytelling to describe their personal values and how they might use these insights in the future. We would like to point out that during the interviews, we took on an active role, engaging the entrepreneur in a sensemaking process. The importance of doing so is stressed by Cope (2003) for researchers to clarify meanings and importance related to experiences.

3.4.2. Observations

The second method of data collection consisted of observations. Through the observations, which lasted approximately 5 hours, the entrepreneurs were observed during the workshop. The observations enhanced our primary method of data collection as we referred to the workshop in the interviews and enabled us to observe the participant's behaviour and (body) language. In our

research, body language was of equal importance as verbal language because gestures and other forms of body language have the power to co-compose stories (Gabriel, 2000). The observations also increased our understanding of the entrepreneur's behaviour and even allowed us to gain, to a certain extent, insight in their 'life-worlds', enabling us to refer to those in the second interviews. In addition, through observations we were also able to increase our understanding of the social context in which the workshop took place, as observations have the power to enhance the researcher's ''independent view of the experience [in] which the [participant's] language has constructed those realities'' (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993, p.99). Nevertheless, it is important to stress that during the observations our role as researchers was passive as we did not engage with the participants in any way. This role is also acknowledged by Flick (2009), who refers to this way of observing as non-participant observations in which researchers aim to study topics such as the development of attitudes, narratives or communication. In this research, adopting a passive observant role was important as we attempted to avoid influencing the participants' experience during the workshop.

3.5. Data analysis

The data analysis commenced simultaneously with the data collection as we started transcribing and coding processes while still conducting interviews. Thus, it can be argued that coding in this research has become part of the analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the short interviews before the workshop, we analysed interviewees' behaviours, body- and verbal language, and during the workshop, the analysis continued when we observed the participants engaging in the workshop as well as during the in-depth interviews after the workshop. All observations and insights were written down, so we were able to return to these later during our analysis.

In order to capture all gathered data, all interviews were recorded with agreement from the interviewees. According to Gabriel and Ulus (2015), recordings of interviews allow researchers to take a step back and look at the data more objectively. After the interviews, these recordings were transcribed as soon as possible in order to capture any behavioural observations and emotions. In order to guarantee the interviewees' anonymity, pseudonyms were established and will be referred to throughout the findings and discussion. A list of the pseudonyms can be found in Appendix A. Following, the interview transcripts were coded and analysed by the use of

qualitative data analysis software. The process of coding the transcripts for the first time was executed individually, so both of us were able to draw our own conclusions and insights, thus being able to provide each other with a 'reality check' (Saldaña, 2013). This first round of individual coding could be regarded as initial coding (Charmaz, 2002) and happened without predetermined codes. By maintaining an open attitude towards our data, we aimed to minimise the chance of missing out on any interesting topics. During the initial coding, we followed Saldaña's (2013) coding strategies, and applied a combination of descriptive, values, and simultaneous coding methods. This writer argues that through both descriptive coding and values coding at the same time, simultaneous coding took place. Descriptive coding allowed us to discover broader topics in the data, and values coding enabled us to code the values, attitudes and beliefs. Finally, simultaneous coding occurred as we often applied two or more codes to a specific or overlapping part of the data. According to Glesne (2011), simultaneous coding was appropriate to our data analysis as the data often contained multiple meanings as ''social interaction does not occur in neat, isolated units'' (p.192).

When the initial coding was completed, the different interpretations and understandings were discussed and resulted in new codes, which Weston, Gandell, Beauchamp, McAlpine, Wiseman and Beauchamp (2001) refer to as rich codes. The process of determining the rich codes enhanced our sensemaking processes as we spent more time with the data. These codes were constructed in a manner that Charmaz (2002) identified as focused coding. During this process, we went back to the literature, raw data and categorised codes, and re-coded our findings through which new insights arose. This process consequently led us to identifying themes in our data. Theming the data is said to enhance analyses in qualitative studies (Saldaña, 2013) when analysing topics such as one's identity construction, world-view, thought patterns and emotional experiences (Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson & McSpadden, 2011). Furthermore, the observations from the workshop were transcribed within one day after the workshop. These transcripts were added to the existing data in our qualitative data analysis software, through which we were able to analyse and code the material together with the interview transcripts.

3.6. Limitations

Even though narrative research can allow for great value as it takes into consideration different meanings (Boje, 1995), it is important to consider the fact that narratives can be told multiple times and can thus also be interpreted in many different ways. Therefore, a risk of multiple voicing exists (Gergen & Gergen, 1988) which could possibly influence the way a story is told and conveyed. In addition, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) argue that researchers in the tradition of social constructionism are often ‘’less systematic and confrontational in their criticism [...] than, for example, critical theorists’’ (p.30). Furthermore, as topics such as (narrative) identity construction, sensemaking and thought worlds are regarded as complex phenomena as they transcend multiple fields and take into consideration multiple realities, they are considered to be problematic to understand and interpret (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In addition, as both concepts are best understood as processes, this makes it impossible to measure exact outcomes as the work of it will never be finished. Therefore, it is impossible to address their entire scope in this thesis. As these topics can also be regarded as closely linked to subjectivity, it was crucial that we adopted a reflexive approach through which we reflected actively on any gathered data while trying to stay objective. Finally, as the interviewees expressed their stories through oral narratives and as we, as researchers, analysed their stories and presented these as narratives in this thesis, Rhodes and Brown (2005) argue that through this, we ourselves can be considered as storytellers.

3.7. Chapter summary

In this chapter, we discussed the research site and the workshop which was given by the municipality. The ontological and epistemological considerations were discussed, and as we depart from a social constructionist track, we argued for socially constructed realities which were both influencing as well as influenced by sensemaking processes. Furthermore, our research philosophy touched upon our reasons to interview the participants at two different moments in time, as the aim was to establish a space in which the participants felt more at ease to share their personal experiences and which created a context for their narrative accounts. Additionally, observations were executed during the workshop which were regarded as a complementary source of data, allowing us to gain insights in the setting in which their reality constructions came into existence, which entailed the setting of the workshop. When analysing our data, an

abductive approach was chosen to complement our research as we went back and forth to the data in order to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying patterns during the sensemaking processes of the entrepreneurs. Additionally, the data was coded by means of initial and focused coding strategies (Charmaz, 2002), during which we coded and recoded the data, thus spent time with our findings and resulted in new insights over time. Finally, the limitations of our research were outlined and possible risks have been identified which were considered while writing this thesis.

4. Results

This chapter consists of an overview of the results derived from the first and second interviews as well as the observations. Throughout analysing the data, four different levels of both intra- and interpersonal sensemaking were identified, which, we argue, seem to have an impact on the construction of the narrative identity of the entrepreneurs. The interpersonal levels are the entrepreneurial sphere, the entrepreneurial hub (Starthub) and the teams. Finally, the intrapersonal level has been identified as the self.

4.1. Finding oneself in the entrepreneurial sphere

In this part we highlight how the entrepreneurial sphere is perceived to have an influence on the sensemaking and narrative identity construction for the entrepreneurs.

4.1.1. Not following the normal path

Throughout the first interviews, a pattern was discovered in the way the interviewees talked about their interpretation of entrepreneurship. It was interesting to see how entrepreneurship was idolised and described in such a positive manner. Not only how entrepreneurship was perceived by the interviewees, but also how they felt when entering this industry. For example, one of our interviewees described how he felt when he was being introduced to the entrepreneurial 'world':

> *It showed me that there are actually people that don't follow the normal path, and that make a very good living, and have fun doing something that you're not supposed to do. I saw that a lot of people just don't have the feeling like they have to… they would do it because they want to create something new. And I saw that it was working for all of them. So I thought, okay, this is a whole new world* (Peter).

As he described it, working as an entrepreneur is not the orthodox way to go, but rather perceived as something people are not supposed to do. Maybe one could even argue that because it is not the standard way to go, it arguably becomes more appealing to work in. Nevertheless, Peter described it as a whole new world where people do not have to, but want to work for themselves. Agnes, one of our other interviewees, also made a comment that she thought the

‘entrepreneurship world’ was super far away from her, but when she became an entrepreneur, she discovered that *‘’actually, it is not. You can just go inside and do your stuff’’*. She expressed that before becoming an entrepreneur, she expected that entrepreneurs lived in their own world and that it would be inaccessible for outsiders, thus, making it difficult to enter. Her notion that everyone can just come in and ‘do their stuff’ implicitly conveys the message that no one is perceived differently, and that entrepreneurs can do what they feel like doing. This is also what Peter experienced, as he expressed that entrepreneurs are not forced to confirm to anything but that they can do whatever they want. Other interviewees also mentioned that since they became entrepreneurs, they had the feeling that they did not need to conform to rules anymore.

4.1.2. Not being a misfit

When being introduced to entrepreneurship, some interviewees had already worked in existing organisations. Although not all interviewees had the experience of working in an existing organisation, they did have preconceptions about working in (large) organisations compared to the life of an entrepreneur. Those expressions draw on previous statements as this perspective stresses the *musts* and *have to’s* of organisations compared to the freedom of being an entrepreneur. For example, Chris expressed that this freedom is not only related to the work itself, but also who you are as a person:

> *I despise big companies and how they are structured, probably that's why I left my job. I spent a lot of time at work, and it's time that you spend of your own life. I just want to be who I am also at work. If you go into big companies, you have to be someone else again. You have to play by the rules. Otherwise, you're the misfit of the company* (Chris).

Chris expressed that he felt he could not be himself at work, because when he did not conform to those rules, people did not appreciate him for that. He also found that now, being an entrepreneur, he did not have to do that anymore. He argued that ‘’as you are spending a significant amount of time at work, it is better to be yourself’’. We found that more entrepreneurs felt this way. For example, Jack expressed that by being an entrepreneur, he did not have to comply with the norms, nor did he have to take the road people perceive as normal:

> *People argue that you should become an expert within one subject. And I never really liked that. I don't want to go this route, I just want to do everything* (Jack).

Jack here expressed that he felt his thinking differs from the majority of people as he is not complying to the 'norm' which society has put on him, meaning that instead of complying, he founded his own company. However, our results indicate that this freedom turned out to be a paradox itself as most interviewees perceived this freedom liberating and terrifying at the same time.

4.1.3. Being a wreck

Throughout the interviews, and especially during the interviews after the workshop, interviewees opened up to us and acknowledged that there are also downsides to entrepreneurship. During his (short but ongoing) entrepreneurial journey, Peter discovered that some of his characteristics contradicted his perceived image of entrepreneurship, which made it harder for him to maintain his motivation and positive mindset:

> *I mean, something that I've always hated is certainty. I don't like stability, that's the thing. I get bored very easily. But at the same time, I didn't know that not having stability was such a tough thing. Because when you have the possibility to decide a lot of things for yourself, then that's a lot of pressure that you normally don't have, because normally someone is deciding for you. It's great because you have a lot of possibilities, but it's also easy to get anxiety, because it's like, 'hey, am I doing this right?'* (Peter).

Here it seems that Peter did not expect that the freedom would also lead to anxiety and that his perception of entrepreneurship might have been more positive than it actually turned out to be, as it is regarded as normal to comply with the norm of following the conventional path. Following their own path might have resulted in unexpected events, which in turn apparently resulted in increased levels of anxiety. As it turned out, not only Peter had to deal with these contradictory feelings. When we spoke to Nick during his second interview he said that *''it seems I know where I am going, it seems… but on the inside I am a wreck''*. In broader context, we interpret both Peter's and Nick's statements about insecurity as something typical for the practice of

entrepreneurship, and in particular among young entrepreneurs as they do not have many points of reference yet. For most of our interviewees, it is their first 'real' startup in which they dedicate a lot of time and effort. And what might have seemed liberating at the start of this journey has resulted in anxiety by now. Nick also explained that *''not knowing what will happen can be stressful. It feels like… not having control''.* Not having control and the unlimited amount of options and paths here resulted in stress among most of the interviewees and can be considered part of the freedom paradox.

4.1.4. Images of entrepreneurship

While the aspect of 'being yourself' was emphasised throughout our interviews, it was surprising to discover that during first round of interviews (before the workshop), most interviewees did not consider themselves as entrepreneurs. For example, when we asked Amber how she felt being an entrepreneur, she replied *''I don't particularly call myself an entrepreneur''*. This is interesting, as our interviewees did find themselves in an entrepreneurial hub. When Amber continued, she said:

> *It's something I would want to, like, to be… to be an actual label… no matter what this label means to you, I would like to be the typical definition of it. I feel like Oprah. Before she was Oprah* (Amber).

When Amber said she felt like *''Oprah before she was Oprah''*, we asked her what she meant by that. She answered that when Oprah started her show, she wanted to become the greatest TV show host, and Oprah said, '*''if it works out, that would be great, but if it does not, no harm is done''*. Here, Amber gave us the impression that she would like to achieve something great, but that she felt she is not there yet and therefore does not label herself to being an entrepreneur. This might have to do with the uncertainty of what entrepreneurship entails. For her, she expressed, it would be more of creating a movement of social entrepreneurship rather than making money. The inability to identify oneself with being an entrepreneur is further illustrated by Jordi, who compared himself to his team member and argued that he is less 'entrepreneurial' as he views entrepreneurs as people who do certain things, which he apparently does not:

> *I'm not even sure if my view on the like traditional entrepreneur is the same as it traditionally is…. I think that [team member] is like the traditional sort of entrepreneurial guy. Because he's this Renaissance guy, playing music and studies to become an engineer* (Jordi).

Jordi had quite a specific image of what an entrepreneur seems to be, and he did not consider himself to be one as this clashed with the image he had of entrepreneurs. Throughout the interviews, it happened more often that when we were looking at the image our interviewees had of entrepreneurs, they rarely considered themselves to be one.

4.1.5. Yearning to create something

Throughout our interviews we were able to dig deeper into the topic of why most interviewees did not think of themselves as entrepreneurs, which we were partially able to do due to the strength of choosing semi-structured interviews. Here, a discrepancy was discovered between the self-view and characteristics or traits which entrepreneurs should have, according to our interviewees. It appeared that there was a consensus among all interviewees, who argued that they possessed certain strengths which they found were needed to either practice entrepreneurship, or which indicated that the path to entrepreneurship was not an unexpected one. Jack, an interviewee who has been in the field of entrepreneurship for over a year now, stated:

> *Before this, I didn't really have any thoughts of doing entrepreneurship, even though I had all of the traits for being entrepreneur. I'm super curious. When I look at the world, I see problems that I want to fix* (Jack).

His motivation for entrepreneurship is visible as he argues that entrepreneurship is about fixing ‘things’ or making ‘things’ better. Throughout the interview, it also became visible that for him, these ‘traits’ could be traced back to his childhood. His statement is reinforced by Anne, who argued that her entrepreneurial side has also been visible throughout her life:

> *I think I've always been very driven, very curious, very problem oriented. Always questioning things… Maybe that led to being driven. Questioning why things are the way they are, how can we solve them. Putting things apart so that I can put them back together in a more efficient way. That is what I used to do as kid as well* (Anne).

4.1.6. Is it all about making money?

The entrepreneurs find themselves in an entrepreneurial hub in which coaching and other forms of support such as workshops and training are not uncommon. Nevertheless, during the interviews, we discovered that the focus on hard skills (measurable subjects) is more present compared to the focus on softer skills. When looking into (previous) experiences of the interviewees regarding coaching, training or other forms of guidance, the majority found that a focus was put on making money, building a feasible product or service and crafting successful pitches. Although the entrepreneurs do receive guidance, they did find themselves focusing more on the static or measurable subjects. For example, Nick described a meeting with his business advisor in Starthub as followed:

> *She identifies the problem; you have to know how to make a profit. And she's trying to get me to attend to the business side. I think its two different sides of the same coin. So it's like developing the product, but also caring for the business aspects* (Nick).

Due to this focus on the business side of the new venture, the majority of the interviewees felt that there was little to no time left to focus on the 'human side'. Not all entrepreneurs entered the program with long-established teams, but the interviewees expressed that so far, no guidance or training had been provided to facilitate the teamwork aspect. Regarding the 'human side' of the business, it appeared that this did not fit on either side of the coin:

> *We normally skip it. I don't know why exactly… Because we feel it's not useful maybe. Or we have the feeling that we just need to hurry because we do not have time for this because we need to get things done* (Agnes).

When continuing this conversation, Agnes also expressed that the storytelling workshop that was yet to be held would focus more on the inside, and that therefore *''no one [would] ever know that [the entrepreneurs] did it''*. This is strongly in line with the focus on the measurable and static facts, rather than the intangible and 'fluffy' part of doing business. For example, Anne expressed:

> *There's so much focus on the business plan, the idea, financing and so on; what was the product? Is it going to be sustainable? There are so many things around what you're going to do, but not about why you are going to do it* (Anne).

Here, Anne stressed that the hard and measurable skills are focused on, and she referred to the lack of other kinds of training as a 'gap'. She furthermore claimed that there is little focus on why entrepreneurs start their business, which is quite important in the first phases of the venture as the entrepreneur needs to have a sense of direction.

Our findings suggest that the focus on the business side has an impact on the way the interviewees identify themselves as entrepreneurs. An example of this was given by Jordi, who perceived his current project as *''traditionally entrepreneurship-esque''* because for him, entrepreneurship implies that entrepreneurs are able to create a viable and profitable product or service, which he is doing in this project. He continued explaining that his previous experiences were not entrepreneurial as they were either non-profit or charity projects. When we talked to Daniel, he claimed that the basic principle for him was to make his team as much money as possible. These opinions are quite aligned with the perspectives of their business coaches, who also focused on business plans and viable products or services.

Besides the money-centred approach, there was also a high need among the interviewees to do something back for society or to fulfil one's quest in their search for bigger meaning. Amber clearly expressed this need as followed:

> *You know, we're all from different communities. So everyone is helping their own community in their own way. So I just figured, my community definitely has [certain]*

> *problems. I felt like I… If I don't do it … if I don't put my knowledge in practice for my own community, then what am I really doing? You know what I mean?* (Amber).

She continued to motivate the decision of starting her own company. Here, we assume that there is a high need to give back to the community. From her interview, this search for bigger meaning clearly hints towards the field of social entrepreneurship, as she argued that she decided to take the entrepreneurial path for her community rather than her idea being a profitable business plan. Amber also mentioned that because she is not in 'there' to compete, she *''probably lack[s] some of the qualities you would expect from an entrepreneur''*. Since Amber's main motivational driver for starting her own business is the social aspect, she bases most of her startup-related decisions on the social aspect instead of considering its impact on the attributed monetary value. However, doing this might have manifested in her doubting whether she possesses the qualities to consider herself an entrepreneur, resulting in the feeling that she is not in that league. Her expression also implicitly indicated that typical entrepreneurs might be in the 'game' to compete and earn money. We carefully argue that this seems to be somewhat aligned with the implicit and explicit norms within Starthub and its focus on measurable steps and monetary value.

The findings further showed that the entrepreneurs expressed their motivation for entrepreneurship being guided by passion. For example, Nick expressed that although his business advisor focused mostly on whether his idea would make a viable product, he wanted to focus on making the process fun. As we shed light upon the fact that the business coach tried to shift Nick's focus towards the business side, he expressed that this was not his aim:

> *I've come to the insight that I do want to try this, like, from seed to bread concept that I actually started. And the best is the creative process… Because that's the fundamental part actually. I think I've come to the realisation of not doing anything for the money. I think of it having like some itch in my fingers* (Nick).

Other interviewees also expressed that for them, even though being an entrepreneur might be tough sometimes, their passion made the struggles worth it. For example, Simona faced some obstacles throughout the process, but nevertheless decided to continue, and stated *''I am so*

passionate about it that I want to keep on working with it''. Both Nick and Simona faced obstacles in their process but felt that since their passion is reflected in their startup, it is worth to keep going. Both felt that their passion is their driver, and that, due to the fact that they are so passionate, they were able to conquer the obstacles they faced.

While different reasons are detected to go into the field of entrepreneurship, there seemed to be a conflict among the reasons to start a company and the norms of 'society'. This conflict was cautiously expressed by Amber, who doubted whether she could consider herself an entrepreneur as she was not in the game for the money. However, the fact that entrepreneurship stands for doing 'something better' was considered to be the main motivator for the majority of our interviewees. One example was given by Jack:

> *I think humble entrepreneurs have a way better chance at succeeding while the arrogant entrepreneurs that make a shit ton of money will just fall out of the system very quickly, because that's not what entrepreneurship stands for. For most people, entrepreneurship stands for doing something better* (Jack).

Jack is very clear about the fact that 'arrogant entrepreneurs' will eventually end up being unhappy or that they will not be able to sustain their business, due to the fact that they are in 'there' for the money. Even though Jack was convinced that passion should be the foundation for every entrepreneur, the monetary aspect seemed to affect the confidence of our interviewees. Simona drew upon this issue as well:

> *I do think that there is a domination of ideas that are just going to bring money to people. There's not so much space for those companies in social entrepreneurship. So sometimes, you feel frustrated because you feel like 'I don't fit that'. That my idea is not valid enough, because I'm not contributing to reinforce that narrative* (Simona).

Simona expressed her frustration towards the entrepreneurial ecosystem, which is painted to the outer world as an inclusive space in which everyone is able to practice what makes them happy. As most of our interviewees were eager to relate to social entrepreneurship and had the strong

desire to give back to their community, they found themselves in a difficult position in which they were implicitly expected to comply with the (unwritten) rules of the entrepreneurial community while explicitly expressing themselves as 'money-making devices'.

4.2. Being an entrepreneur in a network

In this section, we draw upon the different experiences of the interviewed entrepreneurs when considering their feeling of belonging. First, we dig into the in-group perspectives, thus on a broader level, targeting the specific entrepreneurial environment. By doing this, we aim to visualise the ambiguity between both in-group and out-group experiences.

4.2.1. I finally fit in

As is previously explained, the interviewees were all part of the same entrepreneurial hub. It is interesting that throughout the interviews, a certain image of this 'inclusiveness' came to the surface. Jack expressed his gratitude of being part of Starthub as followed:

> *Sometimes I feel lost. But then I find use in talking to others in the hub, engaging in a dialogue with them. Everyone is so interesting, different, quirky and weird, And it is interesting, seeing ideas transforming into something, that's truly amazing* (Jack).

During our second, in-depth interview directly after the workshop, Jack opened up more about his life and events that shaped him as a person. When we asked Jack regarding Starthub, he said that he was really happy as *''you are allowed to be yourself, I feel that I finally fit in somewhere''*. If we take Jack's experiences into consideration when analysing the atmosphere at the entrepreneurial hub, we can assume that the hub gives him stability and confidence through this 'rollercoaster of entrepreneurship' as Simona herself referred to being an entrepreneur. The statements from Jack very much correlate with Daniel, who expressed that:

> *Everyone is friends. It's different from normal work places, because normally people do their own stuff. But in there, everybody helps each other* (Daniel).

4.2.2. Sea full of sharks

While we have provided a clear overview of some of the (positive) opinions of the entrepreneurial hub, this view is not shared by all of our interviewees. It appears that there was an evident division in place of people who either felt they belonged in this hub, and others, who expressed that they became demoralised when working in Starthub. An example was given by Simona, who explained that due to some other entrepreneurs at the hub, they *''really made me doubt myself''*. She felt that there was no group feeling among the entrepreneurs who are part of the hub, and that people should support and motivate each other, which, she exclaimed, did not happen:

> *I really don't get why people get competitive instead of being supportive. You can still give advice that is useful, without being an asshole. But it is a bit demoralising as you share the same space and you get the same opportunities. You know... Like, these are the rules, and you just have to try to swim among the sea full of sharks* (Simona).

Simona links her expression of 'sea full of sharks' to the fact that, according to her, the vibe at the entrepreneurial hub could be described as a 'macho atmosphere'. She further argued that she did believe that the hub could bloom when all participants would actively work on making the hub a more supportive and inclusive place. The lack of support was also touched upon by Amber, who believed this could be explained by the dominating discourse on making money as well as by the *''the ongoing struggle in this patriarchal world''*.

4.3. The team, a melting pot of different perspectives

When looking into the interpersonal levels of sensemaking that might have influenced the sensemaking processes of the entrepreneurs, the third level was identified as the team. In this setting, the teams consisted of two or three entrepreneurs working together on their venture within Starthub. When exploring previous experiences of the interviewees, we discovered that the majority found it hard to work on their projects by themselves. They felt that they benefited from working with one or more team members for multiple reasons, which will be elaborated upon in this section.

4.3.1. Working alone is tragic

When talking to Simona about her experiences as entrepreneur, she told us that she experienced the entrepreneurial journey as intense and tough. She explained:

> *I think being alone is very tragic in the sense that you only have yourself as point of reference. So it has been like a roller coaster. But also very exciting, especially since I found a partner, it is like the whole feeling about it completely changed* (Simona).

Having herself as only point of reference was something Simona was not comfortable with. By expressing this, we could argue that she values discussions and a sparring partner who provides her with honest feedback. She also mentioned that she needed someone to reassure her when she was in doubt. She ascribed this change of perspective to her new team member, as this made her feel reassured and more comfortable, and that it now felt like she is going somewhere:

> *I never actually had a community that matched my own values. But now I'm having that and it feels like I'm building my own world where I can feel comfortable* (Simona).

From the rest of her interview, we were also able to extract that she valued working together. Simona commented that when she was working in a company before, in which people did not work together nor did create a good atmosphere, this made her feel bad. This experience was one of the reasons for her starting her own business. She expressed she valued working with people who create a good atmosphere, and stated that *''that's why I quit, because it was hell on earth''*. As Simona is now in charge of onboarding herself, she had a clear mission to find members who create a nice atmosphere and are supportive. We argue that this need might stem from her previous work experiences as well as her negative experience within the hub.

4.3.2. I have been blinded

As seen before, Simona felt like she needed someone to discuss her ideas with. She felt like she needed this to have a different perspective on her startup as well as improve the idea she had already had. During the interviews, Nick referred similarly to his period of working alone:

> *I think I have been a bit blinded, because I worked with the product for so long… I needed someone who I can share ideas with* (Nick).

Both entrepreneurs have been looking for someone with who they could share ideas with and who could help them build their business. They felt that they needed a sparring partner who complemented the weaknesses that they have, and the insecurities of not being good enough. In addition, having a partner enabled the interviewees to benefit from an 'outsider perspective', as they both shared the need to receive feedback. In line with this, Chris expressed his need for a sparring partner in a different way and stressed the importance to *''diversify your team arrangements and constellations''*. When we asked why, he answered:

> *It's important to have a diversification of strengths, beliefs and values, and with that you can have a nice melting pot of all kinds of strengths* (Chris).

The fact that the entrepreneurs were already aware of their (lack of) skills might be a sign of reflexivity. As Chris referred to a 'melting pot' and 'constellation' within teams, he argued for the need for diversity. He furthermore motivated this statement as he felt it prevents getting stuck in a certain way of thinking.

4.3.3. Glasses

In the interviews directly after the workshop, we asked the interviewees how they felt regarding the storytelling workshop. Remarkably, the workshop was described by some of the interviewees as something special:

> *It just gave me different glasses to look at life. It made me more aware of what's happening around me instead of just being too much in my head* (Simona).

Although Simona's expression can be perceived as a positive outcome, we were interested in what happened in the individual's sensemaking. Maria reflected upon the workshop as followed:

> *At first, it wasn't easy. I had to, like, push myself, like 'just do it, come on'. Sort of, like, remove the shield we usually have when we have a conversation. Yes. So I was actively trying to be honest, and like, invest myself in this workshop* (Maria).

Thus, although the exercises might have resulted in 'new glasses', perspectives and increased awareness, the process throughout the workshop was experienced as being tough. During the workshop, we also observed that some participants showed signs of discomfort when they were asked to describe their values by means of a personal story. As Maria explained, she had to actively engage herself and open up during the workshop. However, when she managed to open up, she expressed to us that she experienced this as followed:

> *You feel like you have to put on the shield a lot of times, and it takes energy. Since we broke down that shield. You can be real with each other* (Maria).

Both Simona and Maria expressed that they felt like a barrier was removed and new perspectives were gained. Through sharing stories, several interviewees explicitly expressed that a 'holy, safe space' was established. This might have a relation to the level of trust, as people are more willing to share knowledge and stories when there is trust.

As is explained above, the exercises during the storytelling workshop encouraged several of the participants to step out of their comfort zone, which we feel was partly accomplished through increased levels of trust and understanding among the participants, which enabled them to create a space in which they could feel safe to open up and share their life stories. This understanding is visible in the expressions of Peter and Agnes, who individually expressed how the storytelling exercises increased their understanding of each other:

> *At first, we were like 'oh, shit, we don't have any values that match'. Just like two or three. But after the exercises, it seemed like almost all of them actually matched. I even had one of which my team member said, 'hey, I feel like this could also be mine', you know? That was amazing. I think that we were more similar than we thought* (Peter).

> *First I thought like, 'who am I working with, I don't know him'. And then, when we started talking and telling stories, we found that they were kind of the same* (Agnes).

We assume that through the storytelling exercises, Peter and Agnes became more aware of each other's life experiences, which created something Brandon refers to as 'value coherence', meaning that alignment exists between the team members' values, even though the values on paper might differ.

4.3.4. See where everybody is coming from

Another reflection was expressed by Amanda, who referred to her role as active listener as *''só difficult! We are trained to confirm, and it was extra hard because they were personal stories''*. The fact that through 'active listening' a process was set in motion is of particular interest to us. It appeared that several participants were not used to not interfering when someone was telling a story, as they relate this to being in a daily conversation in which you give cues, add to the story or ask questions. In addition, Jack also reflected upon being an 'active listener' and explained that during that moment, something was triggered:

> *It was something that made me think… got my brain going. And to me, that is so satisfying. Just hearing what other people had to say. Because it's not very obvious that you would share these stories just with everyone. But I think that's very interesting, seeing where everybody's coming from* (Jack).

All interviewees agreed upon the fact that even though adopting a role as active listener may not have resulted in any life changing experiences, it did provide an opportunity in which the interviewees were able to view things in a different way than they were used to. Maria elaborates upon her role as active listener as followed:

> *It brought up a lot of things that were already there. But I just needed to, like, where are the glasses... and see them? Because now I have a clear idea of the other person's experiences. We all see each other as people, but sometimes, sometimes, we tend to forget that each one of us has an experience and went through something* (Maria).

During the interview, we also observed how Maria physically expressed the activity of 'looking for her glasses'. She explained that through the exercises and her role as active listener, she increased her understanding of the other person. In addition, she expressed that active listening also served as a reminder to be more tolerant towards other people, and not automatically assume what might appear to be the most logical explanation.

4.4. Storytelling and identity co-creation

This section illustrates how the workshop was perceived as a therapy session for some of the interviewees, and how it served as a vehicle for reflection upon themselves and the experiences that have shaped them. These reflections resulted in ambiguity between their personal values and possible norms, thus affecting their sense of self. Furthermore, this section portrays how, through seeing one's values on paper, its power to reinforce one's identity became evident.

4.4.1. Research as therapy

In terms of reflexivity, the interviewees appeared to be already moderately self-critical preceding the workshop. Nevertheless, after the workshop, Chris expressed that:

> *In everything you can find some kind of teachings and learnings that you can and have to look into, it is about how you interpret things* (Chris).

When we asked Chris whether he already reflected upon himself and his decisions regularly, he answered that he usually never expresses such reflections, at least not verbally. Chris claimed that reflecting back on his values and the stories attached to them made him think. During his interview, Chris also expressed his difficulties to open up during the workshop and Maria referred to the storytelling workshop as *''some sort of therapy session''*. Notably, they were not the only one to experience the workshop this way, as during the interview after the workshop, Nick commented that both the workshop and interviews *''felt more like a therapy session''*. During moments like these, we, as researchers, experienced how the interviewees tried to make sense through such reflective stories for themselves, not sure whether they were conveying the message to us. The manner of expressing themselves changed throughout such moments, as we saw people getting 'lost in their own thoughts' more than once. And, what might even be more

interesting, was that after they made sense for themselves, they seemed somewhat relieved of sharing these thoughts while at the same time insecure as they were not sure we were still on the same page as them, resulting in awkward giggles or laughter.

4.4.2. What we are expected to want

During the workshop, storytelling appeared to function as a vehicle for the participants to engage in conversation. When reflecting on possible normative values, the entrepreneurs perceived a certain negative emotion towards these values. For example, Daniel told us that it is important to think about what you want, *''instead of what you are expected to want''*. Although he expressed this as something positive, it might have come as a surprise for some of the other interviewees. For example, Maria recalled:

> *I learned that some of the values didn't belong to me. It was rather something that was given to me and that I took as a rule. It's a rule that I follow every day. So it felt like it was mine. You know the feeling when you think that something is yours? But then you figure out 'oh, no. That's not mine'* (Maria).

Although it might not have been as black and white as Maria described, we were able to detect a change in thought patterns. This change became visible during the interviews after the workshop in which the interviewees reflected upon the workshop and expressed that even though they took a different path than most people, they could still be receptive to norms. For example, Jack said that he found it interesting to ask himself the question *''is this actually a value that comes from within me? Or is it a norm that society puts on me?''*. As we discovered throughout the interviews, the interviewees did consider themselves belonging to a special category in society. They saw themselves as different, as people who did not take the 'conventional' path and entered this new 'world' of entrepreneurship. When the entrepreneurs were confronted with the power of normative rules and taken-for-granted beliefs, they actively started thinking about distinguishing their own values from norms.

4.4.3. Who am I?

Some of the interviewees expressed their difficulties about being confronted with the normative aspects of live, which became visible through their values during the workshop. Several interviewees found themselves in a reflection circle that was not finished just yet. Besides that these normative values were experienced to be negative, the workshop also triggered some uncertainties. Jack expressed his feelings towards this normative facet as followed:

> *Basically directly after the workshop, I started thinking 'maybe I should have [told another] story'. So maybe this event that happened in my life would be a good fit for this one instead of what actually said. So I mean, yeah, for a day basically, I kept thinking about other stories, and analysing them myself* (Jack).

This statement represents the feeling or urge to perform, which various interviewees experienced during the workshop. Even though it was emphasised that the stories were their own and that there was no right or wrong, the participants felt pressure to find a suitable story. For Jack, this resulted in reflections afterwards. When looking at the other experiences, Anne also felt she needed more time to reflect on the workshop and her values. She felt that it was a somewhat longer process which could not be completed in one day:

> *It is good because it changes your thought patterns... You have to sort of go back and look at them and see how you feel, in a week or so. So I figured, I will give it a week and then I will digest it. And when I go back to it I'll see what happens* (Anne).

Anne explained here that she needed to 'digest' the workshop. She felt that she needed to go back to the given values and corresponding stories and see what will happen. Both Jack and Anne implicitly noted that this reflection is an ongoing process and that they, besides thinking about it, actively need to work with it. Apparently, taken-for-granted thought patterns might reveal unexpected outcomes when people start digging, which also might have led to personal confrontations. This is what Amber experienced:

> *I need to sit myself down… Oh, my gosh. But then, who am I? No, I don't know if I want to face that right now. I will have to face them at some point and I just don't want to accept that just yet* (Amber).

Here, Amber indicated that she might know how other people have influenced her throughout her life, but nevertheless felt insecure when being confronted with the normative values that these people might have put on her. She might have known already, but at the time of the interview, she was not ready to face this confrontation and actively work on it yet.

4.4.4. The computer understands me!

Although the interviewees mentioned that within entrepreneurship you can be yourself, there are still norms they have to comply with. Not only those within the entrepreneurial field or network, but also within institutions and families. For example, Peter expressed that for him, the workshop functioned more as a confirmation of who he is. When we asked him whether he often reflected on his values, he stated:

> *I think we rarely think about them. But I do think they are present in my daily life in every way. Like, I think that's me because I see myself reflected in it* (Peter).

When we continued and asked how he felt regarding his values and the stories he told, he answered that he felt reassured in the values that he believed he has, as *''it's good to see [them] on paper and see like, okay, this is why I am like that''.* When we talked with Elle, one of the coaches who participated in a similar workshop that was organised for the coaches of Starthub, she expressed that her values felt like a confirmation of who she was and exclaimed:

> *I did the test, I read the results and got excited, like 'yay, someone understands me'! The computer understands me! This is telling me what I think I am, but that's it!* (Elle).

Looking at this feeling of reassurance, we considered whether this could have been both a result from socialisation within the entrepreneurial world as well as the possibility to perceive this reassurance as some consequence of dealing with a high level of anxiety within the field of

entrepreneurship. The aspect of identity reinforcement through *''seeing one's values on paper''* where Chris referred to was also elaborated upon by Peter, who drew upon reinterpretation processes of the brain when reflecting on the feeling of reassurance:

> *I think that once you make a choice, your brain just changes all the stories so they make more sense, the choices that you make, you start seeing things differently* (Peter).

By creating a life narrative which is constructed through events that occurred at different moments in one's life, people choose to tell stories they believe make sense and 'fit' the overall life story, so it becomes a whole, according to Peter. During the workshop, participants also reflected on how and why certain experiences may have formed their narrative identity. It is fascinating to discover that the values, thus, the 'empty words', were shaped into personal values through storytelling. By doing so, participants appeared to have identified that these values, which in a way represented the events that occurred in their lives, often serve as drivers or motivation for them. For example, Nick stated that *''in this startup, it's been actually the values that have driven me to do this''*. Additionally, Elle also expressed that the values became her guides to prioritising. Both interviewees expressed that by knowing their values, it was easier for them to align actions towards reaching certain goals. As became clear throughout Nick's interview after the workshop, he reflected that without certain values, he probably would not have chosen to develop this particular product as that would have resulted in a discrepancy between his values and those of his customers. It is therefore of interest to discover the deeper meaning of entrepreneurship for our participants and identify whether a coherence is present among 'why' they chose to develop a certain product and what they deem is important for them.

4.4.5. Values became mine

Through the interviews, we discovered several levels by which the entrepreneurs' values were possibly influenced. Besides 'seeing values on paper' may have resulted in identity reinforcement for several interviewees, it is also noteworthy to mention that other processes were also set in motion, such as, amongst others, the effect on one's self-esteem, as happened for Simona:

> *I always doubted those qualities, the values that I have. But now I'm seeing them on paper, it feels like 'okay, that's exactly who I am'. I should not always underestimate myself. These are my qualities and I have to work with what I have* (Simona).

We assume that by knowing her values, Simona felt reassured and her self-esteem increased. Anne elaborated on the feeling Simona experienced as followed:

> *Once you see it on paper, it becomes more tangible. When you have something in your mind and don't write it down, it is harder to implement. Until they come down on a piece of paper… then you can claim them as yours* (Anne).

Thus, Anne even expressed the feeling of 'what the paper says, was perceived as the truth'. Throughout the interview, we discovered that Anne also felt she possessed certain skills and values, but that she was still uncertain of these due to the impact certain life experiences had on her. She strongly feels that now, she is in a way 'allowed' to assign the given values to herself and through this, her identity is assumed to be strengthened. However, Chris argued that the reassurance of one's own values might not be correct, as he found it tricky in the sense that he perceives people incapable of judging themselves:

> *As a person, we still have certain rules and views, that is how we are influenced. Can you judge yourself? I don't know. That is why for me, the outside perspective sometimes is really important to have as well, but that might be too philosophical* (Chris).

When the interview continued, Chris reflected on the fact that we (people) do not see our own faults, and in line with the above mentioned, he made the comment regarding the values that he felt the values could best be described using the metaphor of a fortune teller as *''we wish [some things] to be like that''.*

4.5. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we intended to highlight the dimensions that we discovered, which, we argue, influenced the self-image and narrative identity of the young entrepreneurs. The structure of the chapter was intentionally arranged to funnel down from the wider entrepreneurial sphere to the network the entrepreneurs find themselves in. We discovered that the interviewees tended to idealise entrepreneurship, which resulted in a paradoxical outcome. Having all control appeared to have led to anxiety and lacking sense of direction for the majority of them. Besides that, while the interviewees perceived being an entrepreneur as something that allows them to do 'whatever they want', we discovered that there are nevertheless social norms that they need to comply with. We found that, when the entrepreneurs were not 'recreating this narrative', this led to negativity and decreased support within the hub, both from coaches as well as peers.

From the Starthub layer, a transition has been built into the team dimensions. In this context, the storytelling workshop took place, and the entrepreneurs engaged in creating their narrative identity within their team. We found that the workshop made the entrepreneurs more aware of the dimensions within the teams, providing them with 'glasses' to 'open up their eyes' to the diversity and personalities within the teams. This process created 'holy' moments and arguably led to increased trust within the teams. The final layer presents the level of the self. This layer builds onto the influences of the other interpersonal pressures and focused on the experience of the entrepreneurs regarding the workshop itself as well as their experience regarding their emplotment of the self within the entrepreneurship. We found that the entrepreneurs felt both surprised and shocked, or, on the contrary, reassured when 'seeing their values on paper'. Opening up to the taken-for granted beliefs triggered the entrepreneurs and made them aware of their stories in relation to their values, while telling stories and creating the narrative identity.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, we build the bridge between the reviewed literature and the findings from our empirical research which have been presented in the previous chapter. More specifically, we will expand on how the workshop functioned as an arena initiating reflection and sensemaking processes, and how four different levels have been identified which, we argue, influence the construction of one's narrative identity.

5.1. Sensemaking based on storytelling

To begin with, we would like to recall the adopted definition of sensemaking in this thesis, which is ''the making of sense'' (Weick, 1995, p.4) of both individual and social activities through which individuals create and shape meaning (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Weick, 1995). In the previous chapter, we have elaborated on how the participants reflected upon certain life events and tried to make sense of these through the social activity of a storytelling workshop. By doing so, we have developed the understanding that a paradox seems to be present both in the way the workshop participants described their view upon and their image of entrepreneurship. On the one hand, the majority of the entrepreneurs we have studied seem to believe that by practicing entrepreneurship instead of working for a (larger) firm, they felt they can be themselves. The aspect of 'being themselves' manifests through statements such as 'no rules' and 'not being a misfit'. This perceived freedom can be ascribed to the fact that entrepreneurs, especially in the first stages of their startup, are its main source of direction (Churchill & Lewis, 1983), resulting in a lot of freedom for them. This corresponds to what Steyaert (1988) wrote, being that entrepreneurship can be viewed as a journey which pursues and creates its own story.

However, on the other hand we perceived that this freedom resulted in higher levels of anxiety as the entrepreneurs expressed that they felt overwhelmed to be completely in charge, as they are unable to rely on anyone but themselves when making important decisions. We have observed that when boundaries are scarce in the entrepreneurial life, entrepreneurs felt that they missed someone who pointed them in the right direction (Nick), which ultimately led to anxiety for the majority of them. This 'someone' may either belong to their network or team, and could enhance team diversification and provide new perspectives. Here, existing literature (Brown et al., 2009;

Gabriel & Connell, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) argues that stories have the power to serve as effective means for sensemaking in times of turbulence and change. In this scenario, we argue that, based on statements expressed in the interviews such as that the entrepreneurial journey was described as ‘a rollercoaster’ and ‘not having control’, the entrepreneurial sphere can be regarded as one full of freedom, turbulence and change.

We have previously argued that, when being part of the tough environment in which entrepreneurship takes place (Kalyanasundaram, 2018), entrepreneurial learning is considered crucial in order for entrepreneurs to increase understanding of themselves (Allcorn & Stein, 2016; Bietti et al., 2018). By participating in the storytelling workshop, entrepreneurs engaged in active learning and sensemaking processes through which they reflected upon their life course. As, during the workshop, storytelling was used as a vehicle to initiate sensemaking (Kaye, 1995), the interviewees expressed during the in-depth interviews that by using storytelling, they acquired ‘different glasses’ and ‘opened up their eyes’ to the different perspectives within their teams. Many writers have addressed this power of storytelling to enhance sensemaking processes (Boje, 1991; Boyce, 1996; Brown et al., 2009) and identity construction (Gabriel, 1995; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). We feel that triggering these sensemaking processes may have resulted in perceived increased understanding of the self as well of their team members which arguably has led to increased levels of trust within the team.

5.2. Storytelling as both individual and collective activity

Storytelling in the workshop functioned as a vehicle for communication through which the entrepreneurs engaged in a deliberate attempt to make sense of what being an entrepreneur meant to them and their (narrative) identity. As we take on a social constructionist perspective, we argue that identity construction takes place in social contexts. In line with this, Maitlis and Christianson (2014) claim that sensemaking involves active co-creation of situations that individuals try to understand. Considering that people have different perspectives, teams and groups consist of individuals that create intrapersonal accounts based on previous experiences (Steigenberger, 2015). This means that individuals create different interpretations based on their experiences and knowledge, which they bring with them in their team. We argue here that the entrepreneurs who participated in the storytelling workshop engaged in co-creation of their

narrative identity on both individual as well as collective level. We suggest these two levels as the entrepreneurs developed their stories based on personally selected values, but that during the workshop, these stories were shared within the teams. Thus, on intrapersonal level, the entrepreneurs engaged in telling their story within their team, a story that was based on their previous experience. In turn, these stories influenced the storytelling entrepreneurs because the stories were told within the team, both consciously and unconsciously shaping interpersonal sensemaking and creating a life story narrative (Johansson, 2004; Jones et al., 2008).

It is important to address the notion of Gioia and Thomas (1996) who argue that individuals develop different perspectives of an event depending on their role within a group. What struck our attention, was that throughout the interviews and observations, we developed an understanding of the specific roles these entrepreneurs adopted within their team. As mentioned, one of the entrepreneurs was described as the 'renaissance guy' by one of his team members, appearing to be the creative genius who came up with the idea for the startup. When interviewing the 'renaissance guy' himself later on, his self-view seemed to correspond to the statement his team member expressed of him. For this reason, we are wondering if, through both explicit and implicit indications, such as cues and other forms of non-verbal language expressed among team members, the identity of oneself might have been reinforced. However, we like to stress that ambiguity is present regarding how the self-image of an entrepreneur influences the perception other team members have of him or her, and vice versa. This process of identity reinforcement might have occurred as a continuous and simultaneous stream of sensemaking and sensegiving processes. This claim is in line with the psychological theory of McAdams and McLean (2013), who argue that when two individuals engage in a collective sensemaking process, these stories permeate the other's stories. Besides that, Mills (2003) noted that meaning created through sensemaking both permeates as well as constraints identity practices. In the workshop, the image team members had of other team members might have permeated or constrained the creation of one's narrative identity as well as the other way around.

Another powerful dimension that we discovered when analysing our results was the role of the listener in the process. Normally, when engaging in conversations, sensemaking and sensegiving influence each other simultaneously (Rouleau, 2005). Thus, when one is telling a story,

sensemaking and sensegiving processes might influence the turn a story takes as stories are actively co-created (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). When the entrepreneurs were telling their stories, the other entrepreneurs were instructed by the coach of the workshop to actively listen to the storytelling entrepreneur. We argue that this might have stimulated the sensemaking processes of the storytelling entrepreneur as this person was not interrupted or side-tracked by the others in the conversation. Thus, we argue that the level of co-creation might have been lower than in a normal conversation. Boje (1991) argues that this might have resulted in enhanced intrapersonal sensemaking processes as the teller engaged more in the active construction of the story told. In addition, we like to suggest that while entrepreneurs adopted the role of the listener during the workshop, this might have somehow stimulated the storytelling entrepreneur through cues via non-verbal language such as eye-contact and body language. We do like to stress that non-verbal language was also likely to influence the stimulation of, and triggered the telling of different stories, or even changing a story's plot for the storytelling entrepreneurs, as they might have been influenced by their adopted role within the team or the social norms of the context (Morgan et al., 2018).

While both intrapersonal and interpersonal sensemaking aspects can be identified from the above, interpersonal sensemaking aspects also became visible when we observed the entrepreneurs during the in-depth interviews which took place after the workshop. While they reflected on the workshop and their experiences, we observed that while telling us, they got lost in their own thoughts, and that, after they have been talking for a couple of minutes, they went completely silent and did not remember where they were actually going with their story. We assume here that the workshop triggered certain sensemaking processes, and that, because both sensemaking as well as identity construction are both fluid in nature (Watson & Harris, 1999), several entrepreneurs did not yet find the time to digest all of the information which was imposed on them during the workshop.

5.3. Identity motivates behaviour

It has been previously argued by writers (Dowen & Warren, 2008; Hytti, 2005) that, in order for entrepreneurs to establish their entrepreneurial identity, they must first identify themselves with entrepreneurs before becoming one. It appears that a consensus can be found among the existing

literature and the results of our empirical research, as they both demonstrate that the identification with entrepreneurship may be more challenging than one might expect beforehand. The in the literature addressed dominant discourses such as heroics and masculinity (Drakopoulou et al., 2007) became visible through statements of our interviewees such as ‘’swimming among a sea full of sharks’’ (Simona, 2019). However, during the in-depth interviews, we noticed that most entrepreneurs expressed that through the workshop, they increased understanding of themselves and of their strengths. We argue that their understanding might have increased as creating life story narratives possibly led to emplotment of the self within entrepreneurship. Statements such as ‘the computer understands me’ and ‘that’s exactly who I am’ were expressed, providing us with confirmation of increased understanding, nevertheless, leaving us as researchers with a big question mark.

When analysing these statements, we were intrigued by the level of reassurance the participants expressed they felt when seeing their values on paper and finding a story that correlated to why a certain value was of importance to them. Therefore, we are questioning whether ‘seeing one’s values on paper’ and one’s motivation for entrepreneurship could be seen as part of a reinforcing process. As, through the workshop, the life stories of the entrepreneurs enabled their construction of a narrative identity, subsequently leading towards perceived clarity of their inspired future (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Consequently, this inspired future was provided with meaning and direction (Barrett, 2007) through the plot the entrepreneurs created themselves. Additionally, Barrett (2007) argues that values are considered to be the drivers to achieve one’s dreams, which subsequently became visible through the social construction, belief, and motivations of oneself. While the values appeared to serve as some sort of guidance and direction, we are wondering how the normative aspect of ‘seeing the values on paper’ might have influenced the answers of our interviewees. As one of the interviewees expressed, one might also easily believe a fortune teller as *‘’we wish [some things] to be like that’’* (Chris). As one’s need for self-confirmation is fulfilled through one’s identity (Swann et al., 1989), it is considered to be a direct motivator for one’s behaviour (Burke, 1991; Marcussen & Lange, 2003).

5.4. Narrative identity construction

As we have discussed, the entrepreneurs found themselves in an entrepreneurial sphere, network and team. Gergen (1991) argues that people establish their identity in relation to their context and interpersonal relationships. When we identified the two levels through which the individuals are influenced in terms of their self-image and (narrative) identity construction, namely interpersonal and intrapersonal, we were able to distinct four layers which we believe had an impact on the self emplotment of the entrepreneurs within the context of entrepreneurship. During the workshop, the entrepreneurs both influenced and were influenced by two layers, namely themselves and their team member(s), which we have touched upon in the previous section. Nevertheless, two more layers were identified, which are Starthub and the larger entrepreneurial sphere. We argue that these two other layers are likely to have a regulating effect on the entrepreneur's narrative identity. As Alvesson and Willmott (2002) indicate, identity regulation consists of the intentional effects of social practices on the construction of one's identity. Within Starthub, for example, the coaches steer the entrepreneurs into the *''two sides of the same coin''* (Nick), which can be understood as the focus on making money in this context. These social norms, such as the goal to earn money, can either become resources in the identity formation of the entrepreneurs as well as constraints as the entrepreneurs feel they have to comply with these rules (Watson, 2001).

According to Warren (2004b), changes in self-identity occur through social interactions with different groups that share social norms which might deviate from the entrepreneur's own. In line with this, Alvesson and Due Billing (2009) argue that these social structures and contexts constantly influence the norms of the entrepreneur, as well as recognise power relations in one's social context. We suggest that these power relations do have an impact on the self-identity of the entrepreneurs, where both coaches and other hub-members can be held responsible for. This conclusion can be derived from the fact that the majority of the entrepreneurs told us that they felt negatively affected by the atmosphere within the entrepreneurial hub, which was referred to as *''swimming among a sea full of sharks''* (Simona), as well as the strong emphasis on making money.

While the aim of the workshop was to enhance value congruence on several levels, one of the underlying objectives to do so was through identifying the normative, taken for granted beliefs

that entrepreneurs possess. The entrepreneurs engaged in identity work through which they aimed to revise or shape their (narrative) identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), to eventually become one with the self as the values that 'belonged' to them were either perceived as contributing to, or inhibiting the entrepreneurs' self-image or identity. When talking to the entrepreneurs after the workshop, several explained that they perceived the interview sessions as therapy. During those 'therapy sessions', two different types of reactions regarding their narrative identity construction were identified. As touched upon before, some entrepreneurs felt reassured, while others were shocked and exclaimed *''oh my god who am I?''* (Amber). We argue that this discrepancy might have resulted from the normative aspects within the workshop itself. As the intention was to actively work on one's identity, the entrepreneurs were encouraged to find stories related to their values, which were then regarded as proof that the value was the personal value that belonged to the entrepreneur. As entrepreneurs are continuously looking for meaning while attempting to stay true to themselves (Karp, 2006), several interviewees perceived it to be difficult when an they were unable to find a story, as this was perceived to be wrong. We do consider this effect rather normative in itself as it cannot be this black and white and there might be other reasons why someone is unable to find a story at that specific moment. Nevertheless, this was perceived to be wrong, and the entrepreneurs were surprised that they might have carried values that were not their own. This also influenced the narrative identity that the entrepreneurs were creating.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we elaborated upon how a paradox seems to be present in the entrepreneurial life of the interviewees as they partly choose entrepreneurship for its freedom, but that through reflections during the workshop and interviews, they recognised how anxiety derived from this freedom. Existing literature adds to this paradox, arguing that storytelling can serve as a means for sensemaking in times of turbulence, a process that was put into practice during the workshop. Additionally, we have touched upon how storytelling during the workshop occurred in both individual and collective ways, and how a life story narrative was established through reflexive storytelling exercises. By doing so, we encountered how one's narrative identity arguably was reinforced by one's team members, but also how a setting in which the storyteller was not

interrupted by others may have resulted in increased intrapersonal sensemaking processes while still influencing identity co-creation.

Furthermore, we identified a tension between how existing literature argues that people need to identify themselves with entrepreneurs before becoming one in order to avoid any conflicts, while most entrepreneurs did not view themselves as entrepreneurs before the workshop. The latter may partly be explained by the contemporary discourses in the entrepreneurial sphere, such as masculinity and earning money, which implicitly constrain entrepreneurs to identify themselves with the 'label' of entrepreneur. For the majority of the interviewees, the workshop served as confirmation of one's narrative identity as the values reinforced the view they had of themselves, thus increasing understanding through emplotment of the self. Finally, through identification of the four different layers which influence the (narrative) identity construction of entrepreneurs, the most significant factor that caught our eye was how both (social) norms and power relations affected the entrepreneur's narrative identity and how the normative aspect of the workshop arguably also had an effect on the narrative identity formation.

In summary, we have illustrated how the four different levels may have affected the creation of a narrative identity through storytelling, where the storytelling workshop served as a vehicle for reflection and sensemaking processes in order to engage in the emplotment of the self. We do like to stress that ambiguity exists on the interplay between the identified layers and the self, due to the fluid nature of sensemaking processes and (narrative) identity construction.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter we provide a conclusion of the research conducted. We will address the findings and highlight our contribution to the theory. Besides that, we provide options for future research.

6.1. Research contribution

The aim of this research was to enhance existing literature with new insights on how storytelling may serve as vehicle for narrative identity construction among young entrepreneurs. In order to do so, topics such as storytelling, entrepreneurship, sensemaking and narrative identity construction have been brought together as we aimed to understand how entrepreneurs constructed their narrative identity through storytelling. In order to merge these complex topics in our thesis, the following research question has been addressed by collecting rich data through interviews and observations:

> How does sensemaking, based on storytelling, influence narrative identity construction of young entrepreneurs?

In our thesis, we have defined the concept of sensemaking according to the definitions of Weick (1995) and Dunford and Jones (2000), which entails that individuals create and shape meaning through both individual and social activities during social interactions. In our case, the social interactions were found to influence the individual as well as the collective sensemaking processes on four identified levels, which we defined as the entrepreneurial sphere, entrepreneurial hub (Starthub), the team and the self. Additionally, storytelling has been illustrated as both an individual as well as collective activity (Boje, 2001), carrying values, beliefs, experiences and emotions (Gabriel, 2000). The collective aspect of storytelling in this setting became evident through the role of the (active) listener, who influenced sensemaking processes and the way a story was told.

The initial aim of our research based on the storytelling workshop was to gain insight in the meaning of such workshop for (young) entrepreneurs and subsequently in their sensemaking processes and narrative identity construction. Throughout the research process, we were able to

elaborate upon this initial aim and as a result, we hereby attempt to draw upon the deeper levels which were identified. As our thesis' aim was to identify how one's narrative identity was influenced through a storytelling workshop, we identified how this storytelling workshop influenced the emplotment of oneself within entrepreneurship, and vice versa. The emplotment of oneself turned out to be influenced by both interpersonal as well as intrapersonal sensemaking aspects, which, we argue, in turn influence how one's narrative identity is established. More specifically, this process of emplotment could be considered as intrapersonal sensemaking as it implies the self, whereas the levels entrepreneurial sphere, Starthub and the entrepreneurial team are here considered as interpersonal levels as these influence the personal narrative identity construction of (young) entrepreneurs.

By merging the existing literature from different fields with our findings, we concluded that a spiral occurs when (young) entrepreneurs actively engage in storytelling exercises to enhance their (narrative) identity construction and self emplotment within entrepreneurship. Storytelling was used in the workshop as planned tool rather than naturally occurring and functioned as a vehicle to trigger sensemaking processes. From these sensemaking processes, we extracted the following themes to be influenced; (narrative) identity construction, learning and critical reflection. While, critically reflecting on their stories, the entrepreneurs either felt that these stories matched with their self-image or that a discrepancy was created, resulting in a moment of stress. Nevertheless, through both outcomes a sense of direction could be derived, which we argue, was in turn talked into existence when the entrepreneurs reflected on their experiences. Accordingly, talking this new sense of direction into existence might have resulted in action being triggered, which is in line with existing research conducted by Weick et al. (2005), who found that action-based language is a ''springboard into action'' (p.409). The next step in the identified process was that awareness and action became part of the aspired future, as ''we all like to believe in fortune tellers'' (Chris, 2019) because it provides one with a feeling of security or direction. Put differently, we assume that through the workshop, in which the entrepreneurs established their narrative identity, they perceived to have increased their self-understanding and as a result, they felt they were more able to clarify their goals towards their aspired future. By doing so and taking appropriate actions, either conscious or unconscious, we are therefore assuming that their (narrative) identity is reinforced through this self emplotment.

We do like to stress that the process of (narrative) identity construction is never occurring in such a linear or similar manner as described above, and that the situation explained above cannot be seen as a fixed process. On the contrary, we like to note that this process occurs rather non-linear, messy and both conscious as well as unconscious. In addition, the situation above cannot be applied to any given context as both concepts of sensemaking and storytelling are very much influenced by the context in and through which they take place. Nevertheless, we identified the pattern described above as it is the ideal theoretical situation combined with the experiences from the entrepreneurs in- and around the storytelling workshop.

In conclusion, the paradox of freedom and anxiety within entrepreneurship has been found to cause insecurity among the young entrepreneurs. Not only the entrepreneurial environment was found to have an influence, also Starthub as well as team members affect the entrepreneur's levels of anxiety. Therefore, we argue that the storytelling workshop functioned as self-confirmation in the face of this anxiety as the entrepreneurs plotted their values into a narrative identity, providing them with a sense of direction.

6.2. Future research

As to date, similar research within the field of entrepreneurship can be considered limited, future research might benefit from providing more insight in processes such as sensemaking and narrative identity constructions within entrepreneurship through means of storytelling. First, we consider a longitudinal study to be appropriate in order to examine the long-term effects of constructing a narrative identity, both on the entrepreneurs as well as on their venture. Here, a similar workshop could be organised and repeated over time, in order to discover (if possible at all) its lasting meaning for entrepreneurs. As we discovered, the young entrepreneurs felt that narrative identity construction was an ongoing process which led to interesting and new insights. Besides this, other ways in which future research might enhance the existing literature may be through looking into other ways of how storytelling influences narrative identity construction. This may be done for example through gaining insight in the naturally occurring stories and narratives within entrepreneurship as here, the 'normative' aspect of 'having' to tell personal stories is not present, which might lead to new insights in the phenomenon of narrative identity construction. Moreover, since this research focused on one case study, future research focusing

on multiple case studies could contribute to the existing literature by taking into consideration entrepreneurs within, for example, different age ranges. The argumentation for this stems from research that argues that a narrative identity is developed through one's life course (McLean et al., 2007). Additionally, other forms of research could focus on entrepreneurs with more (substantial) experiences gained from their previous startups, thus targeting entrepreneurs who have been in the entrepreneurial sphere for a longer amount of time. As our results have shown that aspects such as anxiety, confirmation and direction played a considerable role in the lives of young entrepreneurs, it might be meaningful to discover whether these aspects may only be visible in the lives of young entrepreneurs or whether they are also detectable among other entrepreneurial groups who possess more or other experiences acquired in the field of entrepreneurship.

Appendix A - Interviewees

Name	Number of team members
Anne	0
Simona	1
Maria	1
Peter	2
Jordi	1
Nick	1
Amber	0
Daniel	2
Jack	2
Agnes	1
Chris	2

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