



SCHOOL OF  
ECONOMICS AND  
MANAGEMENT

# **How do life partners influence entrepreneurial stress coping mechanisms**

A study examining the life partner influence on entrepreneurial stress coping mechanisms during the venture creation phase.

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# Abstract

Stress within the venture creation is a fundamental part of the entrepreneurial journey, if not handled properly, it will have a detrimental impact on entrepreneurial success. Stress coping mechanisms are a well renowned tool to reduce a stressor. Furthermore, life partners play a tremendous role in the life of an entrepreneur, either being supportive or straining. Yet, their influence is underexplored within the field of entrepreneurial research. Wherefor, the aim of this thesis is to understand how life partners may influence entrepreneurial stress coping mechanisms. The dataset consists of 12 cases entailing 24 semi structured conducted interviews with entrepreneurs and their life partners in The Netherlands. The thesis applied an inductive approach, utilizing cross case analysis to identify reoccurring themes and aggregate dimensions. The findings indicate that life partners can provide instrumental and emotional support or be straining. Wherein, instrumental support positively impacts problem focused coping, whereas emotional support enables emotional and meaning focused coping. Additionally, a straining life partner hinders the entrepreneur's coping capabilities and increases stress. Furthermore, this thesis suggests that emotional and meaning focused coping may lead to problem focused coping. To conclude, this thesis argues that future research on entrepreneurial success (1) should incorporate stress coping capabilities, and (2) should acknowledge the influence of life partners on entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial stress; Life partner influence; stress coping mechanisms, Meaning focused coping, Emotional focused coping, Problem focused coping; Emotional support, Instrumental support; Strain.

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# List of abbreviations

LP	Life Partner
SCM	Stress Coping Mechanism
PFC	Problem Focused Coping
PFCM	Problem Focused Coping Mechanism
MFC	Meaning Focused Coping
MFCM	Meaning Focused Coping Mechanism
EFC	Emotional Focused Coping
EFCM	Emotional Focused Coping Mechanism



# **1. Introduction**

The first chapter explores research on the influences of life partners on entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial stress, and coping mechanisms for entrepreneurial stress. The literature review includes both life partners and spouses. While spouses are legally bound, life partners are not (Jennings, 2022). However, as both life partners and spouses often live together and share financial commitments, this study does not differentiate between the two terms. Throughout the thesis, the authors will use the term 'life partner' (LP) to classify all relevant types of relationships portraying to the studied subject.

## **1.1 Social influences on entrepreneurs**

Entrepreneurs around the globe contribute tremendously to the development and commercialization of innovations, play a vital role in global economies, and are seen as a large employer, both within emerging as well as developed economies (van Praag & Versloot, 2007; Zaki & Rashid, 2016). Much of the entrepreneurial research and discussions have focused on the characteristics of the entrepreneur and their eco-system with regards to how these influence venture performance (Carlsson et al., 2013; Landström, 2020; Sarasvathy, 2001; Ward, 2004; Wigren-Kristoferson et al., 2022).

Dimov (2007) states that the entrepreneurial opportunity recognition processes are shaped by the entrepreneurs' social network. The entrepreneur can discover new knowledge, insights and opportunities through information distributed by their network. Shane & Venkataraman (2000) found that social influencers function as information corridors which influence the recognition of opportunities and are considered vital for shaping of ideas. The network of an entrepreneur can include LP, relatives, friends, associates, co-founders and other people in institutions (Witt, 2004).

## **1.2 The influences of life partner on ventures**

LPs who are psychologically more committed to their partners' business are and will be a key asset in overcoming difficulties (Danes & Olson, 2003; Ruef, 2010; Van Auken & Werbel, 2006). Whereas highly supportive LPs would actively cooperate towards common goals associated with

the venture and are likely to take on more household responsibilities. Whereas it is important to understand how LPs can influence entrepreneurs and could either be supportive or straining towards the venture. Moreover, Bulmash, (2022) found that LP support can have a positive effect on the entrepreneur's psychological capital. In which, LP support can be beneficial for the self-efficacy as well as the optimism of the entrepreneur. Adding to this, many studies suggest that self-efficacy is an important factor of entrepreneurial success (Shepherd, Williams & Patzelt, 2015).

On the other hand, a LP with low support to the business could increase stress to the entrepreneurial processes (Van Auken & Werbel, 2006). This suggests that the LP can have both a positive as well as a negative impact, therefore making this research topic relevant for further research.

### **1.3 Entrepreneurial stress**

Scholars agree that being an entrepreneur is stressful and that stress is a fundamental part of self-employment (Boyd & Gumpert, 1983; Buttner, 1992; Cardon & Patel, 2015). White & Gupta (2020) argue that entrepreneurs may be unable to fully escape job-related stress because they are financially and psychologically tied to their ventures. Lastly, long working hours, role ambiguity, and overall more risks associated with uncertainty lead to higher levels of stress among entrepreneurs (Boyd & Gumpert, 1983; Buttner, 1992; Cardon & Patel, 2015; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). Stress is inevitable for entrepreneurs, making this a relevant research topic to further investigate.

Stress in ventures is an important phenomenon, however, there is no universal conceptualization or definition of stress (Schuler, 1980). To conceptualise stress in this thesis, the definitions provided by Holmes & Rahe (1967), and Lazarus & Folkman (1984) will be used. Holmes & Rahe (1967), describe "stress" as any change in the environment both social and internal which requires an individual to alter their usual behavioural patterns. Whereas Lazarus and Folkman (1984) refer to stress as being a psychological relationship between the individual and the environment which is appraised by this individual to be taxing or exceeding their resources.

In the context of this thesis, the authors perceive stress as a change in any environment; social, personal and work-related, where the entrepreneur will appraise this change to be either taxing or exceeding their current resources.

## **1.4 Stress in venture creation**

When entrepreneurs found their own business, they will encounter a large change in both their social and work-related environment. Whereas, entrepreneurs face more stress due to the increased uncertainty that originates from the lack of resources, set processes and strong founding team (Yang & Danes, 2015). Uncertainty creates many difficulties that could hinder the successful growth of a start-up. As a result, many start-ups do not succeed their journey within the first three years of operating (Baron, Franklin & Hmieleski, 2016).

Furthermore, Baron, Franklin & Hmieleski (2016) state that stress management is a critical factor in venture creation success. If a venture faces too much stress, the sustainability of long-term growth declines (Hessels, Rietveld & van der Zwan, 2017; Judge et al., 2001). Due to the high levels of stress that occur in the venture creation phase, the scope of this research will solely focus on companies and entrepreneurs which have gone through the venture creation phase within the past 5 years.

## **1.5 Stress, appraisal, and coping theory**

The stress, appraisal, and coping theory of Lazarus & Folkman (1984), will be leading within this thesis. The theory describes different stages of stress. Firstly, one must determine a change in environment to either be irrelevant, challenging, or harmful. This is considered as the primary appraisal. If considered challenging or harmful, one will automatically lead to the secondary appraisal of the change in environment. This secondary appraisal assesses if the individual has the right resources to handle this change. If an individual does not compose the right resources, any change in the environment will be perceived as stressful. This will result in an individual to identify the situation as stressful, in which one will have to further investigate how to deal with the stress. This last phase after the two appraisals is referred to as stress coping mechanisms (SCM) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Rutter, 2006).

Stress coping is defined by research as the behaviours and thoughts utilized to help manage the internal and external stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress coping is a terminology given specifically to describe the use of voluntary and conscious behaviours (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007). Successfully coping with stress is important as it influences business performance (Stephan, 2018; White & Gupta, 2020). According to Algorani & Gupta (2022), coping mechanisms are generally defined in three categories, namely: problem focused, emotion focused, and meaning focused. Due to the high amounts of stress within entrepreneurship, it is important to further investigate the use and the impact of coping mechanisms among entrepreneurs within the venture creation process.

## **1.6 Life partner influence on entrepreneurs**

LPs provide central support with everyday matters and crises, acting as an encouraging force, a consultant, and overall empowering the entrepreneur (Blenkinsopp & Owens, 2010). On the other hand, LPs can also make demands, for example requiring the entrepreneur to take up more household responsibilities (Blenkinsopp & Owens, 2010). Solomon & Jackson (2014) conclude that higher levels of spousal demands result in less time that the entrepreneur can spend on their venture.

LP influence on venture creation has been researched scarcely (Aldrich & Jennings, 2003; Van Auken & Werbel, 2006). Additionally, few studies have empirically investigated the relationship and between couples with regards to tackling the liability of newness in the venture creation stage (Danes & Olson, 2003; Liang, 2013). However, the last few years increasing research has been conducted on this topic (Liang, 2013b; Venkataraman, 2019). The increase in interest is important as the limited research within this field have identified that unsupportive relationships are unfavorable factors for business success (Adjei et al., 2019; Hessels, Rietveld & van der Zwan, 2017; Judge et al., 2001). Thus, making it a relevant research topic to further investigate how LPs influence entrepreneurs (Bulmash, 2022).

## **1.7 Research purpose**

LPs who are committed and supportive are enabling factors to ventures (Blenkinsopp & Owens, 2010; Van Auken & Werbel, 2006). Since entrepreneurs are unable to escape job-related stress due to their financial ties, it is important to understand how LP support or strain can influence the entrepreneurs ability to cope with stress (Bulmash, 2022; Danes, 2006; Yang & Danes, 2015). As previously mentioned, stress is most present during the venture creation phase due to its significant change in environment. The outcome of stress can have a dualistic role on the entrepreneur, however it is generally accepted that stress can have negative effects on the health of the venture and entrepreneur (Cardon & Patel, 2015). To manage this stress, entrepreneurs can utilize SCMs as identified by Lazarus & Folkman, (1984). These SCMs can be influenced by social factors such as LPs.

The purpose of this research is to examine how LPs potentially influence entrepreneurial stress and to identify the influence these LPs can have on SCMs. To summarize, this thesis seeks to provide an answer to the following research question:

**How do life partners influence entrepreneurial stress coping mechanisms within the venture creation process?**

### **1.7.1 Societal relevance and academic contributions**

This thesis will contribute to the existing field of entrepreneurial research in the following three ways. Firstly, on the domain of LP influence on the entrepreneur. This thesis will contribute to a better understanding on how LPs influence the entrepreneur within venture creation phase (Danes, Matzek & Werbel, 2010; Yang & Danes, 2015). Secondly, this thesis will add the existing understanding of how SCMs can be utilized to limit stress among individuals. The scope of this thesis will be focused on stress related to the venture creation phase and how LPs influence the coping mechanisms of the entrepreneur.

Accordingly, this thesis will focus on the three most notable and effective coping mechanisms; emotional, problem and meaning focussed coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; White & Gupta,

2020). Hence, this study provides contextual understanding to stress coping theories (Algorani & Gupta, 2022; Baqutayan, 2015). Lastly, this thesis investigates the influence of LP support on entrepreneurial SCMs, in which the thesis aims to build context on how LPs influence SCMs.

The combination of these two theories have previously not been studied, therefore the findings of this thesis will be beneficial for the entrepreneurial research domain. The practical implication of this thesis is to aid entrepreneurs with understanding how their LPs might have influence on successful venture creation.

## 2. Literature review

The following chapter will lay the theoretical foundation for this thesis, in which a clear direction for the research is integrated. Section 2.1 will define LP influence, discuss various types of support and strain, and their known effects on the entrepreneur. Section 2.2 will explore the dimensions of entrepreneurial stress and stress related to venture creation. Lastly, section 2.3 will introduce psychological research on SCMs while using cognitive appraisals.

### 2.1 Life partner influence

The effectiveness of support is dependent on both the support giver and the support receiver (Kim, Longest & Aldrich, 2013). This implies that there is a relevant distinction to make about the support giver and their tie to the entrepreneur. According to Aldrich & Ruef (2006), relationships with strong ties are more reliable than relationships with weak ties. The authors describe that strong tied relationships are used for advice, support, and assistance. Strong tied relationships generally consist of family members, LPs, long time business partners or close friends. Furthermore, Aldrich & Ruef (2006), describe weak tied relationships as replaceable relationships, such as colleagues, distant friends, and business partners. Although relationships with strong ties are more reliable than relationships with weak ties, there are still risks that come with strong tied relationships. For instance, LP support is more inclined to be clouded by emotional stakes of the LP, as the LP can be quicker to give advice based on personal interest, for example when the LP does not want to take the financial risk (Messeri, Silverstein & Litwak, 1993).

LPs who are psychologically supportive within the venture are a key asset in overcoming difficulties throughout the first phases of the business (Van Auken & Werbel, 2006).

Within the context of this literature, LP influence relates to the support or strain provided by the LP of the entrepreneur with relation to the venture.

#### 2.1.1 Typology of life partners

According to Bulmash (2022), LP support can be divided in various forms and intensities. Bulmash (2022) found that LPs can be both supportive and straining. Therefore, he made the distinction between four types of LPs. The first type is '**Accommodating**' partners who offer high levels of

support while causing minimal strain. Secondly, ‘**Antagonistic**’ partners display low levels of support but contribute significantly to the strain experienced by the entrepreneur. The third type, ‘**Enlivened**’ partners, provide both high levels of support and strain. Lastly, ‘**Disengaged**’ partners exhibit low levels of both support and strain. In this study, strain was characterized as: “a person’s perception of critically demanding and irritating nature of their partner” (Bulmash, 2022, p.480). Partner support was characterized as: “the perceived caring and understanding exhibited by one’s LP” (Bulmash, 2022, p.480).

High support	Accommodating	Enlivened
Low support	Disengaged	Antagonistic
	Low strain	High strain

Figure 1. Typology of life partners (Bulmash, 2022)

### 2.1.2 Life partner typology influence on entrepreneur.

Moreover, Bulmash (2022), found that partners that are **accommodating** have the most beneficial impact on the entrepreneur’s psychological capital. For instance, an accommodating LP will reassure the entrepreneur of their skillset and that they are good at what they do, furthermore they cause low to no strain, thus barely hindering the entrepreneur in his entrepreneurial tasks. As an outcome the entrepreneur might feel more confident of his own skillset.

When a LP is **antagonistic** and mainly gives strain, without providing support, the entrepreneur has higher risks of pessimism and being overly critical. In this case, the LP demands attention and other personal resources from the entrepreneur. Furthermore, the LP could be critical on decisions made by the entrepreneur. This hinders the entrepreneur from working on venture related activities and might have the entrepreneur become more pessimistic about their venture.



Lastly, Bulmash (2022), found that **enlivened** partners have a more positive influence on the self-esteem of the entrepreneur when compared to **disengaged** partners. Bulmash argues that the high support has more effect than high strain, thus creating more positive than negative impact on the entrepreneur. Whereas a disengaged LP will have low positive influence on the entrepreneur, which generates low positive impact on the entrepreneur.

### **2.1.3 Male and female differences**

Bulmash (2022), concludes that strain caused by LPs is more demanding on female entrepreneurs when compared to male entrepreneurs. When a LP causes strain on the female entrepreneur, it is difficult to be compensated through support. Therefore, female entrepreneurs have higher need for low strain, high support relationships with their LPs. In contrast, Bulmash (2022), found that males are less impacted by strain, and that strain is more easily compensated through LP support.

Marlow & Patton (2005) discuss that female entrepreneurs still encounter outdated beliefs and values that influence the support they receive in professional environments. Granting the traditional gender role division is disappearing, it remains visible in nowadays businesses with a lower amount of female entrepreneurs in the field (Motoyama et al., 2021). This could explain why LP support is perceived to be more influential on female entrepreneurs.

### **2.1.4 Types of life partner support**

LP influence can be **positive (support)**, **negative (strain)**, or **mixed**, generating a variety of outcomes on the perceived levels of influence to the entrepreneur (Bulmash, 2022). In this section the researchers will examine what type of support partners can provide to the entrepreneur, and how this support can have influence. According to Klyver, Honig & Steffens (2018), social support to the entrepreneur exists out of two types of support, namely, instrumental support and emotional support.

#### **Instrumental life partner support**

Shaffer et al. (2001 p.105) define support as “the willingness to expend personal, temporal, and psychological resources on behalf of a particular domain.” Within the context of this study the authors define LP support as: the willingness of LPs to expend personal, temporal, and

psychological resources to the benefit of the entrepreneur and venture. LP support is classified in two types: Emotional & Instrumental support. These can be distinguished by the definition provided by Pierce et al., (1996): Emotional support is the LP's encouragement of the entrepreneur through love, liking and motivation. Whilst instrumental support is provided through help, service, and the provision of information, advice, and financial means, which can aid an entrepreneur with exploiting business opportunities (Abbasianchavari & Moritz, 2021; Burt, 2000; Dimov, 2007).

### **Examples of instrumental life partner support**

Solomon & Jackson (2014), mention that LPs can have positive impact on the occupational success of their partner. For example, LPs engaging in household tasks relieve the entrepreneur of duties at home, allowing more time to relax, or to focus on work. Such forms of support are classified as instrumental support. Klyver, Honig & Steffens (2018), discovered that instrumental support has a direct impact on entrepreneurial persistence in all stages of the venture creation processes. Another example of instrumental support is providing financial support, wherein the LP carries the larger financial burden of the household during the start-up phase. Lastly, a LP can provide the entrepreneur with relevant advice in decision making and problem solving which is also considered to be instrumental support.

### **Emotional life partner support**

A LP who provides lots of support, whilst causing little to no strain might have positive impact on the entrepreneur's optimism and self-efficacy (Bulmash, 2022; Parasuraman et al., 1996). In the research of Pierce et al. (1996), the authors describe emotional support as one's actions that communicate love, care, and support. When combining the various views on emotional support in an entrepreneurial context, one can conclude emotional support to be: supporting an entrepreneur with managing their emotions, mental health, and their feelings.

LPs' emotional support can help with maintaining the entrepreneurs emotional stability in the case of challenging events during the start-up phase (Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998). As mentioned previously, high emotional support from LPs can increase entrepreneurs psychological capital (Bulmash, 2022; Parasuraman et al., 1996). This suggests that emotional support is more focused on mental health rather than instrumental and practical attributes such as knowledge and tangible

assets. Lastly, entrepreneurs with access to high emotional support have an increased chance at entrepreneurial success (Bulmash, 2022; Burt, 2000; Parasuraman et al., 1996).

### **Examples of emotional life partner support**

As mentioned above, emotional support can help and improve the entrepreneurs emotional stability and psychological capital (Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998; Bulmash, 2022). Emotional support can be provided in a variety of ways. Examples include, reassuring the entrepreneur of his capabilities, whereby improving the entrepreneur's self-efficacy. Furthermore, active listening, which allows the entrepreneur to vent their emotions, allowing them to feel relieved. Additionally, Physical affection and comforting, which reduces stress and anxiety. And lastly, positive distraction of the entrepreneur, where the LP could take a day off with the entrepreneur to distract from the stress (Burlison, 2008).

### **2.1.5 Strain caused by life partners**

As mentioned earlier, the influence of a LP on the entrepreneur can be both positive and negative (Abbasianchavari & Moritz, 2021). It is important to recognize that relationship conflicts can place additional demands on the entrepreneur's personal resources, as noted by Solomon & Jackson (2014). Furthermore, a relationship consists of two equals, and the LP should also have the opportunity to receive support rather than solely providing it. In a relationship the entrepreneur must use personal resources such as energy, optimism, and time to provide support their LP, which could potentially drain the entrepreneur. Furthermore, negative emotions from LPs can be conveyed between partners, this could affect the couple's well-being negatively (Westman & Etzion, 1995). Lastly, Bulmash (2022), emphasizes how strain caused by the LP can have negative effects on the psychological capital of the entrepreneur.

### **Examples of straining life partners**

LPs can strain entrepreneurs in various ways, such as demanding or requesting them to take on additional household tasks. This diversion of time and energy from the entrepreneur's venture can hinder their ability to focus and dedicate time in their venture. Another example of strain could be a LP demanding more financial security and stability, this could lead to the LP requesting the entrepreneur to take an additional job to source income. Furthermore, a LP could be very critical

on the potential venture and could persuade the entrepreneur into exiting his entrepreneurial journey. This lack of support can have negative influence on the entrepreneur's psychological capital according to Bulmash (2022). Lastly if the LP does not support the business idea, the LP will be less inclined to support the entrepreneur both emotionally and instrumentally.

### **2.1.6 Life partner influence on entrepreneurial success**

Scholars agree that support can have influence on the entrepreneur, both positive as well as negative. Furthermore, Klyver, Honig & Steffens (2018), state that instrumental support has direct influence on entrepreneurial persistence. They describe that instrumental support provides helpful ways to tackle the continuous challenges that arise for the entrepreneur.

Solomon & Jackson (2014), lay the emphasis on the LP creating an enabling environment for the entrepreneur to work in. Furthermore, high relationship satisfaction between the entrepreneur and the LP can positively impact the entrepreneur. Furthermore, Eddleston & Powell (2012), found that LP support helps with gaining satisfactory work-family balance for male and female entrepreneurs. To conclude, literature suggests that high relationship satisfaction, created by instrumental support is beneficial to the entrepreneur.

Emotional support can benefit the entrepreneur by impacting their mental wellbeing and mental balance (Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998; Bulmash, 2022a). This is as the LP can function as an emotional reliever to the entrepreneur in which the entrepreneur can unload their problems and struggles. This can be done by distracting the entrepreneur from their work and taking their mind off things. This allows the entrepreneur to recharge and be more motivated to develop their venture.

## **2.2 Stress in the venture creation phase**

Gartner (1989, p.47) states that "Entrepreneurship is the creation of organizations", the creation of organizations is a key concept within entrepreneurial research for centuries. However, the creation of a "new" organization has also been identified by researchers and scholars to be stressful. Moreover, researchers and scholars agree that stress within venture creation is a fundamental part of the entrepreneurial journey (Boyd & Gumpert, 1983; Buttner, 1992).

Within the first three years of business a significant number of start-ups give up on their dreams (Baron, Franklin & Hmieleski, 2016). Most failure are due to the complexity and the inability to fully comprehend what is needed within the early-stages of running businesses (Altman, 1983; Berryman, 1983). Within the venture creation process the entrepreneur entails many different roles and activities, in which they might be unfamiliar with (Gartner, 1985). Adding to this, a lot is demanded from an entrepreneur to properly run a successful venture, such as, high workloads with great responsibility, uncertainty while baring risks, and financial insecurity (Baron, Franklin & Hmieleski, 2016).

Dealing with these uncertainties leads to more stress and can result in higher burnout rates and emotional exhaustion compared to non-self-employed people (Jamal, 2007). If a venture faces to much stress, the long-term sustainability of the venture declines. One of the reasons could be that the entrepreneur is unable to cope and keep up with the shift in demand required in their challenging environments (Hessels, Rietveld & van der Zwan, 2017; Judge et al., 2001).

However, entrepreneurial stress literature has produced mixed outcomes in terms of findings regarding the impact of stress on overall success of the entrepreneur. The perspective of Baron et al. (2016), state that entrepreneurs experience low levels of stress since these entrepreneurs have high levels of psychological capital. This psychological capital is mixture of self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, in which entrepreneurs with relatively low psychological capital are likely to exit entrepreneurship. Cardon & Patel (2013) add that stress plays a dualistic role and can be a motivational factor for entrepreneurs but does harm the physical health in the process. No matter the outcome of the stress experienced by entrepreneurs, stress plays a fundamental role during the venture creation process. How an entrepreneur can cope with stress and the challenges within the venture creation process will determine the likelihood of their success.

### **2.2.1 Stress definition and entrepreneurial stress**

The main motivators for entrepreneurial intentions are autonomy, need for achievement, income, prestige, and flexibility (Fayolle, Liñán & Moriano, 2014). Nonetheless, becoming an entrepreneur entails numerous potential down sights and being self-employed has been argued to be the ultimate

stressful occupational choice one can make (Yu et al., 2022). Stress in ventures is an important phenomena, however, there is no clear universal definition of stress (Schuler, 1980).

Holmes & Rahe (1967) define “stress” as referring to any change in any environment that requires the individual to alter their usual behavioural patterns. Additionally, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) refer to stress as being a psychological relationship between the individual and the environment which is appraised by this individual to be taxing or exceeding their resources. Although there are more stress definitions present in literature, the authors will follow the definitions provided by Holmes & Rahe (1967) and Lazarus & Folkman (1984). In which the authors perceive stress as a change in any environment; social, personal, and work-related where the entrepreneur will appraise this change to be either taxing or exceeding their resources.

Being self-employed is argued to require hard work, higher job stress, long working hours, role ambiguity and most importantly more risk compared to not being self-employed (Boyd & Gumpert, 1983; Buttner, 1992; Cardon & Patel, 2015; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). Moreover, Buttner (1992) states that entrepreneurs can lack resources as they often work alone. Especially within the early stages of a start-up, entrepreneurs often lack support from colleagues and need to be able cope with the mistakes they make while fulfilling multiple roles within the company all at once. Without the right skills and experience this could be a lot to cope with (Buttner, 1992).

Higher levels of stress among entrepreneurs is often based on the significance of the decisions they have to make, the diversity and the nature of their tasks, and their level of responsibility whilst ensuring that their decisions are correctly made (Buttner, 1992). Entrepreneurs can experience work-related stress in many different forms, such as day-to-day work related stress to more serious stressors such as the global Covid-19 pandemic and an economic crises (Ahmed et al., 2022). Furthermore, according to Kato (2013), entrepreneurs can experience stress through interpersonal stress, which Kato describes as a stressful occurrence between two or more people that involves arguments, negative attitudes or behaviour which results into an uncomfortable atmosphere.

Entrepreneurs, are unable to fully escape job-related stress due to the fact that the entrepreneur is tied financially as well as psychologically to their venture (White & Gupta, 2020). As previously

mentioned, research conducted on the impact of stress within entrepreneurship has a mixed outcome. Lerman, Munyon & Williams (2021) describe it clearly, classifying stress as either a challenge or a hinder and state that challenges enhance performance while hinderance harm the entrepreneur's overall well-being. Whatever the nature of the stress is, researchers agrees that stress among entrepreneurs has a negative impact on overall business performance or entrepreneurial health ( Hessels, Rietveld & van der Zwan, 2017; Judge et al., 2001).

### **2.2.2 Lazarus and Folkman stress processes**

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) refer to stress as being a psychological relationship between the individual and the environment which is appraised by the individual to be taxing or exceeding their resources. This relationship has two important phases, namely, cognitive appraisal and coping. This cognitive appraisal consists of the primary and the secondary appraisal.

The primary appraisal focusses on the interpretation of the stress, in which the person assesses how the change in environment is perceived. If the situation is perceived to be challenging, threatening or harmful the person will assess the situation using the secondary appraisal. This secondary appraisal will analyse if the individual composes the right available resources to resolve the situation. If this individual does not compose the right available resources, the situation will be perceived as stressful and will lead to the coping stage. The coping stage will examine the stressful situation, and if the situation can be resolved with the use of three different coping mechanisms (Algorani & Gupta, 2022). The degree in which a person firstly acknowledges the stress and afterwards copes with the stress is crucial as this defines if this individual can steer the outcome of the need to alter their usual responding pattern.

### **2.2.3 Cognitive appraisal**

Lazarus & Folkman (1984, p. 31) describe cognitive appraisals as “process of categorizing an encounter, and its various facets, with respect to its significance for well-being”. Which means that before being able to cope with a stressful situation, one must cognitively acknowledge the situation as stressful and assess if one has the right resources. This theory from Lazarus and Folkman is widely accepted and forms the basis for the following chapters.

As mentioned earlier, the cognitive appraisal has two stages, the primary phase evaluates what is at stake; is the current situation troubling or does it benefit? The person can identify the situation as positive, irrelevant, or as composing a danger. If the stress is perceived as irrelevant or positive, one will not feel stress about the change in environment. However, if the situation is troubling, it will be perceived as stressful or harmful. Meaning that the person will start to feel stressed about the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

How one acknowledges stress, influences the degree a person can handle and reduce stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). If the situation is perceived as to be taxed, a person will assess the situation with the second appraisal phase. This appraisal will analyse if the resources at hand are sufficient or insufficient. If these resources are insufficient a change in environment will be perceived to be stressful. After these primary and secondary cognitive appraisals, one will consider the SCMs.

## **2.3 Stress coping mechanisms**

After having identified a situation as stressful or harmful one will automatically appraise the situation with the assessment of possible stress coping resources, this is referred to as the SCMs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These mechanism answers the question if the person can cope with the stressful situation. In which coping is necessary to determine the outcome of a stressful situation (Rutter, 2006). This indicates one's confidence and ability to cope with the current situation and appraises the resources one can utilize. These resources can be physical, social, psychological or instrumental (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Coping with stress refers to behavioural and cognitive efforts one makes to tolerate, reduce, or master the external and/or internal demands which are created by the stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As previously mentioned, there are three major coping mechanisms (Algorani & Gupta, 2022). Please refer to the table below for a clear overview of Lazarus & Folkman (1984) theory.



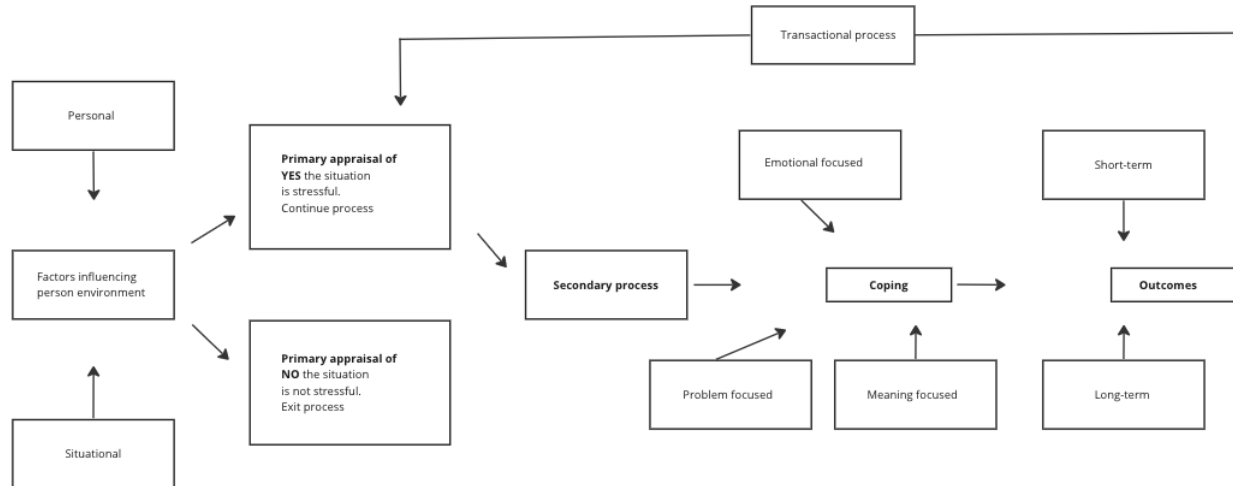


Figure 2. Stress appraisal & Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Algorani & Gupta, 2022)

The first SCM is management of the problem, by addressing directly addressing the cause of the stressful situation, *Problem focused coping* (PFC). The second SCM is the regulation of the emotions and the distress associated with the stressful situation, *Emotional focused coping* (EFC). The third SCM focusses on using cognitive strategies to manage or derive the meaning of the stressful situation, *Meaning focussed coping* (MFC). These three coping mechanisms are known to have great impact, however one should not exclude other mechanisms (Algorani & Gupta, 2022; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping plays a tremendous role in how one can overcome difficulties, if coping mechanisms are used accordingly entrepreneurs will benefit.

### 2.3.1 Problem focused coping

The first coping mechanism is PFC. This mechanism focusses on taking direct actions to reduce the underlying causes of the stressful situation. In which this type of coping mechanism can be utilized to eliminate or reduce the root cause of the stress (Baqtayan, 2015; Taylor & Stanton, 2007). Adding to this Lazarus & Folkman (1984) state that a problem focussed coping mechanism (PFCM) is the most effective in situations where the stress is controllable in a certain degree. However, if the problems are too big to be solved, using PFCM can result in higher stress levels. Therefore this mechanism is only beneficial if the problem owner has the right resources to tackle the problem (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Nikolaev et al., 2022).

According to Baqtayan (2015), Lazarus & Folkman (1984) and Taylor & Stanton (2007), examples of positive problem focussed coping are; making a planning to tackle the problem, taking active actions, and seeking instrumental support. However, not all PFCMs are positive, there are also negative problem coping mechanisms. One of which is behavioural disengagement, in which an entrepreneur will postpone addressing the stress, by procrastinating or hiding the stress.

### **2.3.2 Emotional focused coping**

The second coping mechanism is referred to as EFC; this mechanism focusses on managing the emotional response to a stressful situation. This coping mechanism can be utilized to reduce the negative emotions related to the stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As a result, one is not trying to limit the stress, but one rather accepts the stress and reflects on it. This mechanism can be best utilized if the stressful situation cannot be changed and is most effective if the entrepreneur does not compose the right resources to tackle the stress (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Nikolaev et al., 2022).

Examples of EFC are; regulating emotions, reducing anxiety, finding ways to be more calm and relaxed, and seeking emotional support. When seeking emotional support, an entrepreneur looks for the opportunity to vent as well as to gain confidence and build their psychological capital. Furthermore, a negative way of social focussed coping can be denial, wherein the entrepreneur denies the existence of the stress, by holding back the emotions whilst not wanting to tackle the stressor.

LPs can play a fundamental role within EFC. Baqtayan (2015) found that this coping mechanism helps entrepreneurs regulate emotions ensuring reduced anxiety or depression, whereas the focus of this coping mechanism is to feel more relaxed and at ease.

### **2.3.3 Meaning focused coping**

MFC is the third and last coping mechanism this thesis addresses. This mechanism utilizes cognitive strategies to derive and manage the meaning of the situation. “MFC is not orthogonal to PFC and EFC. Rather, it provides another way to group coping responses based on reappraisals of meaning” (Hewstone et al., 2007, p. 197). Furthermore, Park & Folkman (1997) state that MFC

can be seen as either global meaning or situational meaning. Global meaning is based on how a person endures certain values and beliefs about itself in the world and how they perceive the world to work. Global meaning can for example have major influence on choices a person makes, the pursue of overarching goals, and finally what their expectations are regarding the effect and cause. Lastly, situational meaning is the personal appraisal of a stressful encounter with regards to the goals and implications that this has on a person's overall well-being (Hewstone et al., 2007).

Examples of MFC are; to find a meaning or a purpose in the stressful situation or event that has occurred, by doing so, this coping mechanism focusses on reframing the stressor. This allows personal development and overall room for growth. Another example is to find benefits of a stressful situation and to remind oneself of the benefits within the venture that have previously occurred (Hewstone et al., 2007).

To conclude this coping mechanism can be utilized to change the evaluation of the stressful situation and to make, goals, beliefs, and stressful encounters more compatible. By doing so the person will become more open to dealing with stressful situation. LPs can play an important impact on these aspects, as they can influence the entrepreneurs perception of the stressor and help with reframing and learning from the stressor (Guo, Gan & Tong, 2013).

## **2.4 Concluding remarks**

To conclude, in the venture creation process, entrepreneurs are faced with an extraordinary amount of stress. Research by Baron, Franklin & Hmieleski (2016), has identified that successful stress management is a critical indicator of venture success. This thesis aims to add to the existing literature within the field of how LP influence on entrepreneurs. This influence can be scaled between two variables: support and strain (Bulmash, 2022).

Moreover, this thesis will add context to the existing stress theory by Lazarus and Folkman, (1984). Furthermore, this thesis contributes to the understanding of how entrepreneurs are influenced by external factors with regards to handling stress within the venture creation process. Given this, the thesis focusses on gaining an understanding on how LP influence can have impact the SCMs of

entrepreneurs during their venture creation process. As previously mentioned, the three coping mechanisms can be influenced by LPs.

Therefore, it is important to discover how LPs either positively or negatively influence SCMs within the venture creation process.

## **3. Methodology**

This following chapter describes and justifies the reasoning behind the qualitative approach that was applied within this thesis. To begin, the underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions are elaborated on.

### **3.1 Epistemological and ontology**

Each paradigm entails epistemological and ontological assumptions. “What knowledge is, and the ways of discovering it, are subjective” (Scotland, 2012 p.9). As every assumption is a conjecture, the philosophical underpinning of every paradigm is not able to be empirically disproven or proven. Therefore, understanding both the “what is” and the “what it means to know” is critical to understand. Ontology is considered to be the study of being, and as such ontological assumptions are based on one’s perceived reality and how things work (Crotty, 1998). Epistemological assumptions are made with how knowledge is created, communicated, and acquired and is the nature of a relationship between what can be known and what would be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). All the above mentioned are important to consider, as when conducting research, assumptions are formulated which will therefore influence the methodology.

This thesis aims to answer how LPs can influence entrepreneurial SCMs, in which, the behaviour and personal experience of interviewees should be analysed to better understand the examined phenomena. All assumptions throughout this thesis are based upon interpretative methodology (Scotland, 2012). A qualitative approach was chosen throughout this thesis as this thesis seeks to provide new perspectives, based on the perspective from interviewees (Scotland, 2012). Lastly, constructivism ontology was applied within the framework as the assumption was that the phenomena within this research were examined through socially constructed entities.

### **3.2 Research design**

As previously mentioned, the studied phenomena has been investigated by a rather limited number of studies within the field of entrepreneurship. This thesis contributes to the existing theories of both the typology of LPs by Bulmash (2022) and the psychological stress and coping theory by

Lazarus & Folkman (1984). To do so, this thesis utilized an inductive approach with a qualitative data collection method (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022; Yin, 2011). The outcomes of the collected data were assessed according to the research and theories presented in the previous chapters. In which, the overall findings contribute to the existing and ever growing literature on external forces influencing entrepreneurs during the venture creation (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

This thesis aimed to discover how and why LP influence SCMs; therefore, this thesis entailed a case study design. The use of a case study design fits well within a bounded system and takes the entire phenomena into account whilst allowing specific details to highlight research findings (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Every entrepreneur and their LP in the data set reflected one case and the unit of analysis within this thesis was LP influence on stress within venture creation. This choice of research method benefits the data collection, as LP influence can be studied and be elaborated upon in depth with every respondent (Yin, 2003).

This thesis relied on a multiple case study design, wherein it focussed on multiple cases to investigate the same phenomena. Utilizing this design was beneficial as it was designed to bring out various details from the viewpoints of participants whilst analysing different data sources (Yin, 2003). An idiographic approach was applied as this thesis conducted interviews in which the data was analysed to grasp the unique perceptions of individuals. These were compared in context of the theories by Bulmash (2022) and Lazarus & Folkman (1984). Furthermore, this approach provided relevant insights on “why” and “how” LPs influenced entrepreneurs in specific situations in venture creation. By utilizing multiple-case studies, data from different entrepreneurs was generated to help answer how they perceive their LPs to influence their SCMs. The use of multiple cases allowed for the findings to be tested on uniqueness and frequency in which it promoted theoretical elaboration on the findings (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

### **3.3 Case selection**

A purposive sampling method was utilized as this thesis had selected participants based on a variety of characteristics. The goal of the purposive sampling was to select participants who were able to provide relevant information related to the research question (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Therefore, the cases were selected to fit within the established criteria of this research

phenomena. As the research question is focused on LP influence on entrepreneurial stress within the venture creation, all participating entrepreneurs must have had a LP during the venture creation phase, and still be together now. Additionally, the venture must not be older than 5 years, this is due to the risk of faded memories, which is associated with the oral history form of the interview. Furthermore, the venture needs to be created and operating within the Netherlands. Lastly, the venture needs to still be operating with the entrepreneur on board.

Each case consisted of two participants, namely, the entrepreneur and their LP. This was chosen as to provide an answer to the research question. Both perceptions from the entrepreneur and their LP were considered, as this helped gaining a clearer understanding of the phenomena and associated influences. Furthermore, biases were reduced while validity and credibility increased. This contribute to source triangulation as data was gathered from multiple sources. More importantly, the use of multiple sources allowed for rich data collection through various recollections of phenomena.

The authors applied a heterogenous sampling variety as it best represented the wide range of variety amongst entrepreneurs (Kerr, Kerr & Xu, 2018). Within the chosen scope this added relevance and validity to the two theory models in order to capture the widest range of perceptions possible (Etikan, 2016). Furthermore, the wide range increased sample representativeness as it reduced avoidance bias (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). To achieve a heterogenous sampling variety the authors intended for variety in the cases by gender, age, type of venture and duration of the relationship. These criteria are in line with the findings of the literature as a heterogenous approach is more representative considering the large variety of entrepreneurs (Kerr, Kerr & Xu, 2018).

To conclude, data was collected anonymously as this stimulated respondents to be more open and honest whilst discussing sensitive and personal issues (Kvale, 1994). Please refer to the table below for a description of the participants, all names in the tables below are placeholders to ensure anonymity.

Case number	Name	Data	Type of venture	Years of operating	Number of employees	Industry
1.1	Eric	(M) 40	B2C	5	25	FMCG
2.1	Jessica	(F) 30	B2C	3	1	Animal care
3.1	Lisa	(F) 28	B2B	5	1400	Hospitality
4.1	Nancy	(F) 52	B2B	4	2	Communication
5.1	Alex	(M) 28	B2C	3	9	Leisure
6.1	Frank	(M) 31	B2C	3	4	Leisure
7.1	Oscar	(M) 32	B2C	4	2	Finance
8.1	Floor	(F) 53	B2B	1	5	Consultancy
9.1	James	(M) 58	B2B	5	12	Consultancy
10.1	Amy	(F) 31	B2C	3	8	Leisure
11.1	Sjoerd	(M) 29	B2B/B2C	2	3	Service
12.1	Jane	(F) 41	B2C	3	4	Health service

Table 1 Sample demographics entrepreneurs

Case number	Partner Name	Data	Occupation	Industry	Years in relationship	Type of relationship
1.2	David	(M) 50	Vice president	Cosmetics	13	Married
2.2	Scott	(M) 34	Entrepreneur	Consumer goods	7	Engaged
3.2	Dennis	(M) 32	Financial controller	Finance	8	Life partnership
4.2	Dylan	M 57	Entrepreneur	Hospitality	24	Married
5.2	Sophie	(F) 30	Lawyer	Law	7	Life partnership
6.2	Sylvia	(F) 29	psychiatrist	Healthcare	6	Engaged
7.2	Lotte	(F) 24	Student	-	1	Life partner



8.2	Thomas	(M) 43	Consultant	Consultancy	20	Married
9.2	Kelly	(F) 52	Co-owner food company	FMCG	25	Married
10.2	Jasper	(M) 35	Entrepreneur	Leisure	6	Life partnership
11.2	Ester	(F) 26	PHD Student	-	4	Life partner
12.2	Henry	(M) 46	Doctor	Healthcare	11	Married

*Table 2. Sample demographics life partners*

### **3.4 Data collection**

Data for this thesis was collected by using multiple data sources to gain a broader perspective whilst applying a form of source triangulation (Patton, 2014). By utilizing multiple sources of data this thesis hoped to overcome some of the intrinsic biases that originate from single data source collection (Denzin, 2017).

Source triangulation was applied within this thesis by conducting interviews with both the entrepreneur and its LP. The first interviews took place with entrepreneurs, in which the goal was to gain relevant insights of the studied phenomena. The second interviews were conducted with the LPs of the entrepreneurs, whereas the goal was to gain broader insights on the phenomena and find similarities or new insights through different perspectives.

Both interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide as this provided relevant data and helped gain a better understanding of the studied phenomena (Kvale, 1994). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to ask follow up and in depth questions whilst maintaining consistency across the various studied cases (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Lastly, interviews were conducted in oral history form, as the interviewees were asked to recall stressful situations and the influence of LPs in previously occurred situations (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). To conclude, the use of the LP interviews helped boost the validity of this thesis, as it allowed for data triangulation (Patton, 2014).

### 3.4.1 Validation & triangulation

Prior to conducting the interviews, the researchers conducted a pilot interview to assess the interview guide and received feedback from the piloting participant. As a result, the authors removed a question in the ‘stress’ part of the interview. The pilot interview showed that this question was too similar as a previous question. Furthermore, the authors decided to shuffle the concepts in the interview. Changing it to: *stress- coping - typologies*. Instead of *typologies - stress – coping*. This was done as the pilot interview showed that the participant did not provide relevant examples during the typologies section of the interview. This strengthened the overall interview guide as the feedback was adapted based on the assessment of the researchers.

The interview guide focused on stimulating a trustful and comforting environment, so that the participants would feel more at ease with answering the questions (Kvale, 1994). This was done by starting with simple introduction questions. Furthermore, the first section of the interview guide allowed the entrepreneur to reflect on stressful situations that occurred during the venture creation phase. The second section of the interview section is focused upon getting an in-depth understanding on the impact of LPs on different coping mechanisms. The final section of the interview guide touched upon the theory by Bulmash (2022).

In order to boost validity and reduce bias among the interviews, specific terminology such as strain and support and various coping mechanism were avoided (Patton, 2014). Moreover, the participants were unfamiliar with the authors of this thesis. This was preferred as private aspects were discussed, which are prone to limitations related to honesty and validity. Lastly, the interviewees were unaware of the questions that were asked throughout the interviews, this was done so that the entrepreneur and the LP had no chance to discuss the questions prior to the interview. Please refer to appendix A, for the interview guide with the entrepreneur.

Conducting interviews regarding a situation that occurred in the past, leads to individuals being exposed to higher risks of distortion of memory (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). To address this risk and to add validity to the findings, not only the entrepreneur, but also their LP were interviewed creating source triangulation. By interviewing the LP, new perspectives and situations

were revealed. The LP interview guide will followed the same guidelines of sections 1 and 2 of the entrepreneurs' interview guide. However, the LP interview did not touch upon the third section which related to Bulmash (2022). Since the LP typology theory is focused solely on the entrepreneurial perspective, rather than the LP perspective, and the outcome is perceived support, rather than actual support. Thus, adding no value for source triangulation. Please refer to Appendix B, for the secondary interview guide for the LP.

To conclude, the entrepreneurs were reached via LinkedIn, cold calling, and cold emailing, to ensure that the authors had no direct connection with the entrepreneur. Every interview with entrepreneurs took approximately 45 minutes, and interviews with their partner 25 minutes. Both authors were present during all interviews, in which, the division of tasks was that one author was responsible for conducting the interview whilst the second author was in charge of making notes, allowing the opportunity to ask follow up and in-depth questions (Yin, 2003).

Furthermore, the scope of this thesis were entrepreneurs operating in the Netherlands. Although the native language in the Netherlands is Dutch, the interviews were conducted in English. The Netherlands is ranked first worldwide among English proficiency levels for non-native speakers (Education First, 2022). Therefore, the interviewees were expected to be able to express themselves authentically and had little to no language barriers. Furthermore, interviews were held in English since this ensured that there would be no context lost in translation. The authors of this thesis were both based in Sweden, for this reason the interviews were conducted via Zoom. This provided a less stressful environment and was more time and cost effective (Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour, 2014).

### **3.5 Data analysis**

Each interview was transcribed and analyzed directly after being as recommended by Bell, Bryman & Harley (2022). Thematic analysis was applied as this thesis aimed to highlight similarities or differences across the data set. Furthermore, this technique enabled the researchers to generate unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was in line with the inductive approach applied within this thesis. This approach aimed to generate new insights and explain how and why LPs may influence entrepreneurial coping techniques (Patton, 2014).

The qualitative analysis utilized in this thesis helped the researchers to structure and make sense of the gathered data, whilst generating concepts, identifying different themes, and overall answering the primary research question (Patton, 2014). Moreover, analyst triangulation was utilized in the data analysis whereas this strategy allowed two subjective perspectives to analyze the data (Flick, 2022). Wherein both researchers analyzed all cases separately, this added credibility by strengthening confidence in the conclusions that were drawn. By utilizing both data *source* triangulation and *analyst* triangulation this thesis reduced skepticism that often occurs in non-triangulated studies (Patton, 2014).

The collected data from the first and second parts of the interview were analyzed using the inductive analysis method, as this thesis had no preconceived analytical categories (Patton, 2014). All data was coded in first order concepts using a cross-case analysis and the Gioia methodology (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013; Patton, 2014). After the first order concepts were generated, these concepts were analyzed and divided into broad themes using second order analysis. As the research question is broad and explanatory the authors applied emergent coding to identify broad themes, which is especially effective when using *analyst* triangulation (Stuckey, 2015).

The second order themes were analyzed and categorized within aggregate dimensions identified in the literature review. The themes which could not be categorized in the pre identified dimensions were the basis for so called nascent concepts. These concepts had no sufficient referents in existing literature, and are therefore interesting as they were categorized in new domains, creating undiscovered insights (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). These new domains generated new findings that helped answer how LPs influence entrepreneurial SCMs within the venture creation process. Lastly, these choices were made in line with this study's goal to aid to existing theory on LP influence and entrepreneurial SCMs within venture creation.

The last segment of the primary interview aimed to identify the LP typology. To do so, the thesis applied analyst constructed typologies as described by Patton (2014). In line with the research of Bulmash (2022) open questions were asked with regards to the perceived LP support and strain.

Thereafter, the cases were categorized into one of the four quadrants: *Accommodating, enlivened, disengaged or antagonistic* (Bulmash, 2022).

## **3.6 limitations**

All research designs entail limitations, thus, making it important to understand these. Especially with regards to the interpretation of data analysis, the discussion and conclusion segment. Below, the limitations are presented and elaborated on.

### **3.6.1 Research design**

Utilizing a qualitative research design was beneficial to the context of this thesis however qualitative research can be criticized as being subjective. As qualitative research can compose a lack of transparency, leading to problems with the generalization. Lastly qualitative studies might be difficult to replicate as there are few standard procedures (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). This thesis aimed to address the lack of transparency by following clear guidelines and utilizing common practices within qualitative research papers while using methods provided by Bell, Bryman & Harley (2022), Kvale (1994), Patton (2014) and Yin (2011). This boosted transparency, overall allowing easier replication of the study. Lastly, the limitation of generalization within qualitative research remains a limitation as the sample is not suitable for extensive generalization. Rather, this thesis aims to provide context and understanding behind the studied phenomena.

### **3.6.2 Case Selection**

This thesis made use of purposive sampling due to the criteria that the sample had to adhere to. However, purposive sampling is prone to research bias and findings are often not generalizable to the entire population of entrepreneurs (Etikan, 2016). The authors acknowledged that the findings of this research are limited and based on the people that were sampled for interviews (Patton, 2014). To overcome a part of the limitations surrounding the generalizability of the sample, this thesis aimed to gain a heterogenous sample variety by tracking down a wide variety of entrepreneurs.

### **3.6.3 Data collection**

The interviews conducted in this thesis were exposed to a variety of limitations such as artificiality and trust (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The outcomes of the interviews are individualistic experiences and have a cognitivist approach (Kvale, 1994). This could limit the findings since there are difficulties to verify occurrences and are subjective to the risk of distorted memory. To reduce the impact of these limitations, source triangulation was applied to have multiple perspective reflect on similar situations. This however this did not fully limit the individualistic experiences. The source triangulation further helped tackling the higher risks of distortion of memory that come with interviews that investigate situations that occurred in the past (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

### **3.6.4 Data analysis**

Despite analyst triangulation being used, both researchers analyzing the data were familiar with the studied phenomena, and might therefore have used a similar approach, which limits the discovery of new interpretations (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

## **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues arise throughout the research process, hence, it is important to be aware of these and be prepared to address these issues (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). The participants spoke about sensitive information such as their personal life and about their partners personal life, due to this nature, the thesis incorporated ethical consideration as recommended by Bell, Bryman & Harley (2022).

Before conducting the interview both the entrepreneur and their LP were asked to sign a digital consent form, please refer to appendix C. In this consent form the researchers clarified that the interviews will be anonymized, and that the transcripts will not be shared and are kept confidential. Furthermore, the interviewees were assured that their provided answers would not be shared with their partner, by doing so the researchers avoided creating conflict. Considering the nature of this thesis, which involves behavioural research into the nature of the relation between couples, the acquired data is sensitive. This emphasizes the importance of the privacy of the participants. Lastly, the cases were asked if they consent with interview to be recorded so that the researchers can transcribe and analyse the data.

## 4. Findings

The outcomes of the conducted semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs and their LPs are presented within the following chapter. 12 Cases were analyzed and described following the Gioia method, utilizing the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order analysis. The findings are structured per identified aggregate dimension from the concepts provided in chapter 2. Second order themes were derived by grouping related 1<sup>st</sup> order concepts. In which these 1<sup>st</sup> order concepts are showcased in the tables as quotes. Throughout the findings chapter, every aggregated dimension was strengthened by intext quotes from either the entrepreneur or their LP. Please refer to the table below providing an overview of the data analysis and the coherent literature concepts.

Data analysis		Literature concepts	
Aggregate dimension	Chapter	Literature concept	Chapter
Life partner involvement in the venture	4.1	Life partner influence	2.1
Entrepreneurial stress sources	4.2	Stress in venture creation phase	2.2
Dealing with the stressor	4.3	Stress coping mechanisms	2.3

Table 3. Overview of aggregate dimensions and related literature concepts

### 4.1 Life partner involvement in the venture

LP influence was present in all twelve cases, however, the impact of this influence was not equally noticeable. For instance, a substantial amount of entrepreneurs shared strong and influential insights regarding the overall influence of LPs on entrepreneurs and their venture. These quotes have been categorized in second order themes, these themes can be found in the table below.

1 <sup>st</sup> order concepts	2 <sup>nd</sup> order themes	Aggregate dimensions
Help with tasks in venture Provide financial aid Providing access to personal network	Partner contribution in venture	<b>Life partner involvement in the venture</b>

Reassuring personal capabilities Taking the mind from things Allowing to vent and constant listening	Managing emotions	
Staying optimistic Showing the fun side of things Showing I shouldn't worry too much	Fresh perspective	
Entrepreneurial partner demands Interferes with daily operations Misalignment in job motivation Life partner being critical	Partner hinderance in venture	

Table 4. Data analysis of Life partner involvement in the venture

A common theme within the collected data is **life partner contribution in ventures**. LPs may contribute to a venture by helping with tasks, providing financial aid, and providing access to personal networks. Last mentioned is something that Thomas did to help entrepreneur Floor. Floor said: *“Thomas helped me by opening his network of lawyers and accountants to me and pushed me early on to reach out to them for help.”* Furthermore Sophie, the partner of Alex mentioned that she helped him cover various bills. Sophie said: *“Covid was a very rough period (...) We had to stop the venture and did not get any aid from the government. (...) I covered various bills such as rent and docking fees.”*

Another reoccurring topic identified was the LP helping the entrepreneur with **managing emotions** and feelings. For instance, the LP can reassure the entrepreneur in their skills. Floor explained: *“When I would get in my car in the morning, he would wave goodbye and tell me that I am good at what I do.”* Furthermore, Frank’s partner Sylvia, who is a psychologist, stated that she notices Frank’s stress quickly. Sylvia said: *“I noticed he was very stressed, it is also my job to notice stress, so he couldn’t hide it from me (...) He was very busy in his head and neglected household tasks (...) I would try to calm him down, and relieve his household tasks.”* David, the LP of Eric, helped managing emotions his own way. *“Eric was looking for acknowledgement from my side (...) So I think it was more of a gut check. Again, the most important thing in our relationship is that you support each other, and you're encouraged to do what you really want to*



do.” Lotte, the LP of Oscar, tried to listen when she noticed Oscar being stressed. She said: *“I noticed when he was stressed and tried to really speak openly with him about the lack of cash and push him to reflect on the situation.”* Lastly, Lisa stated: *“Dennis is never stressed, and is always providing me with a listening ear.”*

Yet another theme that appeared multiple times was that entrepreneurs gained **fresh perspective** through their LPs. During Covid many ventures faced a high amount of stress. Such as the venture of Alex: *“She showed me the positive side of things, and reassured that there are better days ahead”*.

On the other hand, not all partner involvement had a positive perception to the entrepreneur, this is classified as **partner hinderance**. Jasper, the partner of Amy, had to focus on his own venture during Covid, and could therefore not assist Amy with her Covid related troubles. Jasper mentioned: *“Covid was a rough period, as the government did not provide aid, as my business was not running for enough time to receive money from them (...) I was focused on my own company.”* Furthermore, Dylan was critical on the way that Entrepreneur Nancy ran her venture, he said: *“I believe that Nancy spent too much time on certain clients (...) which resulted in her dropping clients, and not continuously looking for new clients.”* In turn, he provided her with the following advice: *“I suggested that she should plan her time better and spend less time per client (...) it is too time consuming.”* However, Nancy interpreted this differently and said that she did not feel supported: *“He told me: We can conclude that the way that you are working is not feasible and that I have to improve (...) He can be very direct and does not realize the impact that this comment made.”*

All cases showed some level of LP influence in their venture. However, the above-mentioned cases highlighted the most notable LP influence. The influences of the partner were either through actions, words, or a combination of the two.

## 4.2 Entrepreneurial stress sources

The cases shared different sources and effects of stress. Throughout the analysis of the data, another aggregated dimension was identified, namely, ‘stress recognition by LPs’. In this dimension the focus is on how the LPs recognized and experienced the stress of the entrepreneur.

1 <sup>st</sup> order concepts	2 <sup>nd</sup> order themes	Aggregate dimensions
Considering quitting venture Covering partner expenses Both entrepreneurs exposed to loss of sales	Global disruption - Covid	<b>Entrepreneurial stress sources</b>
Investment stress Financial conflict Dependence on irregular venture income	Financial Stress	
Friends as employees Co-founder separation from venture	Interpersonal Stress	
Sickness Rapid growth Stress by expectations	Other stress sources	
Stress effecting sleep Mood changes Procrastination	Effects of stress on entrepreneur	
Frustration Easily agitated Absent presence Bad sleep Different tone of voice	Change in behavior	<b>Stress recognition by life partners</b>

Table 5. Data analysis of entrepreneurial stress sources

**Global disruption - Covid stress** was a reoccurring theme throughout the various cases. Eric, who made a large investment together with his co-founders was considering quitting the venture because of Covid. He stated: *“They wanted to quit because everything was uncertain with Covid,*

*although there wasn't a lockdown yet.(...) Because of Covid, we could not sell at festivals and hospitality, these were potentially our biggest clients.” Covid also caused rough financial situations for Alex: “In that time I had no income, yet I had to cover all operational bills, for example, the harbor and licenses (...) It didn't make me an enjoyable person” For Frank Covid was also a rough time, yet he tried to remain positive. Frank said: “Covid was also a rough period for us, however, I think it was more on the positive side, I had more stress, but also more work.” Lastly, Amy, whose LP is also an entrepreneur, mentioned that her business plan was already made. However the venture couldn't make sales due to Covid, as a result she had to get back to her old job. Amy: “The business plan was already made, however there were no tours that we could do (...) So I went back to my old job, to provide a stable income for us, as my LP is entrepreneur as well.”*

Another reoccurring theme was that of **Financial stress**. Oscar encountered a financial conflict, as he explained: *“This was a very stressful period, I wanted to launch as soon as possible and focus all my time on the product launch. (...) I was distracted for four months, and I think that overall we were delayed by six.”* Additionally, the dependence on an irregular income can be a source of stress. As Nancy described: *“I need to search for my own customers or else I don't have an income. (...) This is actually really stressful. (...) Preferably, I would like to have a job because of the stable income rather than earning a lot in one month and very little in another month. (...) So yes, in the beginning I generated a lot of customers (...) later on I took on less clients.”*

Another frequently occurring theme was **Interpersonal stress**. In which two cases expressed stress related to interpersonal. Lisa stated: *“My roommates would call in sick, but I knew they were just hangover (...) I felt like they did not take me seriously. (...) I felt like I was a big company, but my housemates made me feel different about it.”* This was not easy for Lisa, as she had to balance running a company and manage the lacking work ethos from her friends. Furthermore, starting a venture with a close friend did not work out well for Floor who said: *“I have long friendships and this was really annoying, this was one of my closest friends. (...) Whilst splitting, lawyers were consulted (...) this was really stressful for me (...) the most stressful situation I ever encountered”.*

The above-mentioned findings are focused on various sources and causes of stress. However, the data also showed the **effects of stress on the entrepreneur**. For instance, various entrepreneurs developed sleeping difficulties due to stress. Nancy stated: *“When experiencing a lot of stress it keeps me awake.”* When faced higher amounts of stress Sjoerd mentioned *“I get grumpy and a bit absent at times because of stress”* The stress encountered affects his overall mood. Lastly, Nancy mentioned *“I am the type of person that will procrastinate the stressful tasks (...) I would think now a really have to take action but then I first would grab yet another cup of coffee. (...) I stagnated because I was searching for the right approach (...) this resulted in more stress.”* Throughout all cases, a source of stress was provided, however, the source and severity of the stress varied per case.

During the analysis, a new aggregated dimension was discovered: **Stress recognition by life partner** which consists of two themes. Stress recognition by the LP was something that came to light during multiple interviews. In this dimension, the LP notices altered behavior from the entrepreneur which they claim is a result of stress. Given this, it benefits from being its own aggregated dimension, as it provides context to the overall phenomena.

The first theme that occurred was **change in behavior**. Wherein a LP can notice the entrepreneur acting differently. Esther stated: *“When he is working, and I interrupt him during a stressful task, than I usually see that he gets a bit annoyed.”* Furthermore, Sophie noticed: *“I can simply notice the restlessness and the frustration when he is unable to alter something (...) he really sleeps badly”*. Dylan says: *“I notice that she will become restless and that she is stuck on certain things as she has trouble falling asleep”*. David notices that Eric is stressed via his tone of voice. David said: *“The thing where I probably, which I will notice the most is he might have a certain base in his voice, he might speak very rapidly in the beginning when he's basically sharing the situation.”*

### **4.3 Dealing with the stressor**

Lastly, the cases described various stressful situations and how they dealt with the stressor. This aggregate dimension has four 2<sup>nd</sup> order themes, namely; addressing the stressor, change of perception, mentally dealing with stress and negatively dealing with stress.

1 <sup>st</sup> order concepts	2 <sup>nd</sup> order themes	Aggregate dimensions
Outsourcing stressful activities Coming up with solutions	Addressing the stressor	<b>Dealing with the stressor</b>
Accepting a loss/moving on Rethinking the stress Stepping back and evaluate Boosting self-efficacy	Change of perception	
Doing fun tasks Venting Comforting Reflecting	Mentally dealing with stress	
Procrastinating	Negatively dealing with the stress	

Table 6. Data analysis of Dealing with the stressor

Throughout the interviews the participants shared various examples of how they dealt with stress. One reoccurring theme was that of entrepreneurs **directly addressing the stressor**. Whereas Eric was immediately thinking of different solutions to address a problem that occurred. Eric explained: *“We couldn’t sell our product in bars and at festivals anymore because of Covid, so immediately I was thinking: Okay what now? Let’s contact grocery delivery companies and sell to them instead.”* Furthermore, Oscar created alternative options of income in case his venture would not work out. His LP Lotte said: *“I noticed him worrying a lot about money, however, haha, (...) If things would go bad, he said he would become a taxi or uber driver.”*

Another theme that was prevalent in multiple cases was the **change of perception** that participants had. For Eric this meant accepting the money that he had invested as being lost, which reduced the perceived stress levels that he experienced. Eric explained: *“And I was, I already lost the money in my mind, so I was only thinking, how will I earn this money back”*. Nancy said she is someone that can get easily stressed, however sometimes her partner makes her change her perception. Nancy said: *“Sometimes I am very stressed, and then he says; O, don’t worry about it, why would*

*you worry about it? And then I realize that it is not as bad as I thought". Furthermore, Lisa struggled with how other people perceived her. She tackled this by changing her self-perception while taking herself more seriously. She described: "I dealt with this by taking myself more serious, knowing that the rest of the world would follow. (...) Eventually you have enough experience and knowledge that you don't have to fake it, and that people will instantly take you serious"*

**Mentally dealing with the stress** is yet another theme entrepreneurs shared. They dealt differently with the stress and their mental well-being. Eric and Oscar both mentioned that they spoke with their LP about difficult situations that have occurred at work. Eric stated: *"I talk about it with my partner, which helps me reflect, then it's out of my mind and I just let it go"*. Adding to this Oscar mentioned *"She just listens and listens to me (...) this really helps even though she is not involved with the business, but she helps me to express my feelings"*.

Lastly, there are also **negative ways of dealing with the stress..** Nancy said she will procrastinate stressful tasks. She explained: *"I am the type of person that postpones tasks (...) I was good at procrastinating, I would sit at a coffee corner for long times, thinking, okay I should really get started now, but would order another coffee just so I didn't actually start working yet. (...) As a result, I had restless nights and experienced even more stress."*

## **5. Discussion**

Whilst analyzing the data, the authors identified various statements that underpin that stress throughout the venture creation phase is a common occurrence. Within all cases, stress was a common theme, however, the duration and the source of stress differed. Three main stress themes occurred throughout the analysis. This provided a clear understanding of how stress impacted the entrepreneur, how the LP influenced the entrepreneur and what SCMs were utilized. The outcome of these three themes provided an answer to the research question.

### **5.1 Global disruption stress - Covid**

#### **5.1.1 Stress source**

Covid was a significant stressor in the venture creation phase for many entrepreneurs. The researchers did not actively steer the participants to highlight Covid related stress. However, the case selection criteria required ventures to not have been founded more than 5 years ago. As Covid was a worldwide pandemic that spread in 2020, most of the cases were significantly impacted, which resulted in a high amount of Covid related stress within the data set. As the future will remain uncertain more global disruptors may occur, therefore it is key for the entrepreneur to act accordingly. The findings of the Covid related stress can provide a benchmark for potential future other global disruptors.

As covered in the theoretical framework, being self-employed is argued to result in higher job stress due to higher overall and financial risk when compared to not being self-employed (Cardon & Patel, 2015; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). The ventures had not yet closed their first book year when covid hit, as a result they were not eligible for government aid. This caused high levels of stress for these entrepreneurs, as they were tied financially and psychologically to their ventures.

Alex started his venture a few months before the first lockdown in the Netherlands. He stated that he had zero income, however still had to cover operational costs. This led him to be stressed and easily agitated. For Eric, Covid led to his co-founders doubting the continuation of launching the venture. His co-founders wanted to quit because they felt Covid brought too many uncertainties to launch. Due to the Dutch lockdown his venture could not make use of the planned retailed

channels. Furthermore, Covid impacted entrepreneur Amy as well. She stated her business plan was already made, money invested, however no income generated. Amy went back to her old job to make ends meet. Lastly, Frank mentioned that Covid was stressful as a lot of bookings came in. He was a solo founder, which resulted in a lot of stress for him during Covid, as his company was experiencing high growth. In each of the mentioned cases, the entrepreneurs experienced a change in environment as taxing or exceeding their resources, causing them to feel stressed. This is in line with the stress definition provided by (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

### 5.1.2 Life partner influence

For entrepreneur Alex, his LP Sophie helped him during the Covid pandemic as she provided a steady base through her full-time income and helped cover the bills. Sophie provided **instrumental support** to Alex by providing financial aid. Sophie can be characterized as an **accommodating LP**, providing high support and low strain in line with the typologies provided by Bulmash (2022). David, the partner of Eric, provided support as he was consulted by Eric to judge the ventures continuation decision during Covid. Eric explained that his co-founders wanted to pull the plug, yet Eric wanted to continue. In which, David was fully supportive as he stated that he encouraged him to follow his gut feeling. According to Bulmash (2022), David is also an **accommodating LP**, as he functioned as a listening partner, while providing **emotional support**.

Jasper, the LP of Amy said that they didn't receive governmental aid, however, Jasper was busy with his own business and therefore did not have time to support Amy. He requested Amy to help with his business, thus being straining LP, which characterizes him as **antagonistic** according to Bulmash (2022). Sylvia, the partner of Frank, would notice his stress early on. She would listen to his worries, allow him to vent, and calm him down accordingly. Whereas she also took up various household tasks, allowing Frank to spend more time on his venture. Sylvia provided both **instrumental and emotional support**, thus can be classified as an **accommodating LP**.

### 5.1.3 Entrepreneurial coping mechanisms

Firstly, Alex dealt with the Covid related stress in a way that he consulted his LP Sophie for instrumental support. She supported him financially by covering the bills. Thus, he addressed the stressor directly by reacting and trying to tackle this problem, which can be classified as **PFC**.



The root cause of the stress was tackled by paying the outstanding bills, reducing stress, and solving the situation. Thanks to this support and solution he was able to sustain his venture. Secondly, Eric's co-founders wanted to pull the plug on the venture due to the Covid pandemic. Whereafter his partner David gave Eric the reassurance that he should continue. Due to this emotional support, Eric was able to calm down, and change his perception, a form of **MFC**, after which he decided to continue with the launch of the venture. He came up with alternative retail channels that allowed the venture to bypass the effects of the pandemic. This launch allowed them to grow in a period in which their competitors did not, as a result, their company is now a market leader in The Netherlands. This final solution of Eric was an example of **PFC**.

Thirdly, Frank's partner Lotte, helped relieve Frank's stress and provided him with instrumental and emotional support. This allowed Frank to see Covid as an opportunity for growth, rather than a setback. This change of perspective is a form of **MFC**. Lotte took over household tasks, allowing him to spend more time to on the venture and keep up with the growth, this is a form of **PFC**. Lastly, entrepreneur Amy noticed that sales declined during Covid, which resulted in her going back to her previous job. Her partner was straining as he was running a venture but relied on Amy's income. This created a lot of tension within the relationship. Ultimately, Amy utilized **PFC** as she generated income for both, however it withheld Amy from investing time in her venture.

The outcomes of Covid related stress for these four entrepreneurs were different. However, all entrepreneurs are currently still running their business, in which, Cardon & Patel (2013) state that stress plays a dualistic role and can not only be straining but also be motivating to the entrepreneur. **PFC** was most present throughout the cases, suggesting that the entrepreneurs tackled Covid related stress by proactively finding solutions. Secondly, **MFC** was utilized by both Frank and Eric which resulted in them seeing Covid as an opportunity, granting more motivation to find solutions which led to using **PFC**. Amy experienced strain by her LP, as she needed to let go of her venture and focus on generating income through employment.

## 5.2 Financial stress

### 5.2.1 Stress source

Financial stress was a reoccurring theme among entrepreneurs. The cases showed a degree of stress derived from financial situations, either in a form of investment, inconsistent income, or lack of liquidity. The literature showcased that financial stress is especially noticeable as entrepreneurs are financially and psychologically tied to their venture (White & Gupta, 2020). Furthermore, entrepreneurs deal with uncertainty while bearing risks and financial insecurity (Baron, Franklin & Hmieleski, 2016). These demand a high amount of the entrepreneurs' psychological resources and may lead to higher stress, as highlighted throughout the cases.

Financial stress was noticeable for Nancy, who stated that she got stressed by the financial insecurity of sourcing her own clients. During the start of her venture, she sourced enough clients, but later she had to conduct more effort into customer acquisitions. This was stressful as she didn't like the sales process. However, the interview with her partner Dylan showed that he believed that Nancy did not want to do more sales, as Nancy was too busy with the existing customers, and did not want to spend more hours per week sourcing clients. Furthermore, Oscar encountered internal financial stress within his venture due to pushy investors. Initially he attracted four investors, when the company sought additional funding, all but one investor insisted on bringing in new capital. This disagreement led to costly legal battles, but Oscar ultimately prevailed. In both cases, the entrepreneurs experienced high levels of perceived stress due to their financial dependence on their ventures.

### 5.2.2 Life partner influence

Dylan, the LP of Nancy, had a more realistic view on the venture and the effort and time Nancy took per client. He said it was not profitable for the venture, and that she should therefore optimize her planning and timing. Dylan provided **instrumental support** by giving advice on how to approach the problem. However, Nancy perceived this to be **straining**, as she felt that Dylan did not support her and did not believe in the success of the venture. Considering that the LP typologies are based on the 'perceived' support from the entrepreneur's perspective, Dylan is an **enlivened LP** (Bulmash, 2022). In this situation Dylan was straining, but next to this Nancy also provided numerous examples of his support. Furthermore, Lotte stated that her partner was facing financial

problems which increased his stress. He had a higher workload but managed to make ends meet. Oscar stated that if things would go bad, he would be willing to become a taxi or uber driver to make enough money. When she noticed this, she helped him to reflect, and pushed him to be open about his feelings. This is a clear example of **emotional support** as she allowed him to vent which helped him calm down and reflect. Lotte is an **accommodating LP**, as she provided active support and did not strain her partner (Bulmash, 2022).

### 5.2.3 Entrepreneurial coping mechanisms

Nancy coped with financial stress caused by a limited number of clients by disengaging from certain tasks, such as sales. Rather than actively seeking more clients, she procrastinated which created the opposite effect. Although she consulted her partner, his advice was too direct and was perceived as straining. In line with Baqutayan (2015), procrastination and behavioral disengagement is a **negative form of PFC**, which caused negative outcomes. As a result, sleeping troubles and stress increased for Nancy. Oscar dealt with the financial stress differently, he sought emotional support from his LP while venting about his financials worries. This allowed him to clear his mind and control his emotions, which is a form of **EFC**. After having vented and spoken with his partner, he was able to draft various scenarios and coherent plans to be prepared if he could not make ends meet. This planning is a form of **PFC**. He was seeking positive **PFC** as he ensured that he had a second option to gain capital in case his liquidity problem expanded.

Once again, the financial stress differed per case. As described above, both entrepreneurs utilized PFC. However, Nancy sought advice from her partner, in which she felt strained as the advice was too direct for her. There was a misalignment between Dylan's perception of what needed to be done to generate sales and Nancy's perspective on the matter. Thus, resulting in a misperception of actual support. This led to her using a negative PFCM, in which she procrastinated her work and increased perceived stress. On the other hand, Oscar was first not able to utilize PFC as his mind with too clouded. He went to his LP to vent about the situation, this allowed him to clear his mind. Thus, he first utilized **EFC**, which in return led him to be able to come up with various plans to tackle the stressor. To conclude, the use of **EFC** allowed him to move on and utilize **PFC**, which ultimately reduced his stress levels.

## 5.3 Interpersonal stress

### 5.3.1 Stress source

The third frequently occurring theme was interpersonal stress. This form of stress was briefly covered in the literature review, yet repeatedly surfaced whilst analyzing the data. Interpersonal stress was classified as a stress that originates from a conflict between the entrepreneur and stakeholders. These may involve arguments, negative attitudes or behavior which create an uncomfortable atmosphere (Kato, 2013). These conflicts require a lot of attention from the entrepreneur as the outcome may influence the venture. Throughout the cases, various forms of interpersonal stress occurred.

For example, Lisa experienced interpersonal stress as some of her roommates were employed in her venture but would occasionally call in sick after a night of partying. Lisa stated that they were just hangover and not sick. She said that this caused a lot of stress as she had to balance running a company whilst employing her close friends. She had the feeling that her friends did not her venture serious, this affected her self-efficacy and confidence. Another example of interpersonal stress occurred to Floor, who had to split from her co-founder. This co-founder was one of her closest friends, however, they did not get along well in a business setting. This separation caused a lot of tension and stress as they had to split equity and goodwill. Legal advisors were consulted to lead this process, which was especially difficult as she used to be close friends with the co-founder. Floor stated that this was the most stressful situation she ever experienced. High levels of stress among entrepreneurs is often based on the significance of the decision one must make (Buttner, 1992). Furthermore, Floor experienced high amounts of stress as this situation affected her on both a social, personal and work-related environment. Therefore, she experienced changes in all three environments as described by Holmes & Rahe (1967) and Lazarus & Folkman (1984), whereas typically such changes occur in only one environment.

### 5.3.2 Life partner influence

Lisa consulted help from Dennis during the interpersonal stress that she encountered. According to Lisa, Dennis helped her during stressful periods. As Lisa explained that Dennis is a calm person that does not get stressed easily and is always willing to let her vent. This is an example of **emotional support**. According to the typology of Bulmash (2022), Dennis is an **accommodating**

**LP** by proactively high support whilst never straining Lisa. Additionally, Floor mentioned that her partner influenced her in various ways. Firstly, through **emotional support**. Thomas relieved stress from Floor by reassuring her of her strong skills and that she is capable. Furthermore, Thomas helped Floor with **instrumental support** by granting access to his personal network. Through his job, Thomas was connected to various top-notch lawyers, and pushed Floor to connect with them, these connections allowed Floor to consult legal help to manage the situation. According to Pierce et al., (1996), this is a form of **instrumental support**. Thomas is an **accommodating LP** as he continuously supports Floor (Bulmash, 2022).

### 5.3.3 Entrepreneurial coping mechanisms

Firstly, Lisa addressed her interpersonal stress by adopting a more serious approach and embracing the mindset that if she took herself seriously, everything else would fall into place. This increased her self-efficacy and helped her overcome balancing running her business whilst employing friends. This was not an easy period for her, as her roommates were employed, but they saw that she was very serious about her venture and followed suit. Many studies suggest that self-efficacy in an entrepreneur is an important factor of entrepreneurial success (Shepherd, Williams & Patzelt, 2015). Due to the high support provided by Dennis, Lisa was able to boost her self-efficacy, which is in line with the findings of Bulmash, (2022) who found that LP support can have a positive effect on the entrepreneur's psychological capital. Whereas the support of the LP is beneficial for the optimism and overall self-efficacy of the entrepreneur. Lisa utilized **MFC** as she changed the perception of her self-efficacy. By changing her self-perception, she improved her self-efficacy, which resulted into the problem of the stressor to be tackled.

Lastly, after analyzing how Floor dealt with stress, the analysis concluded that both **EFC** as well as **PFC** was utilized. EFC was utilized as Thomas helped her feel more confident with her own capabilities. Thomas was always ready to let Floor vent, allowing her to clear her mind. After which, Floor had more psychological capital to utilize PFC by using Thomas his network and reaching out to legal experts.

What can be observed is that different types of interpersonal stress led to different needs and ways of coping. In the case of Lisa, she received emotional support from her LP. By venting to him and experiencing his calmness and perception she utilized MFC. This was done by perceiving herself in a different, more powerful, and serious way. As a result, people around her took her more seriously. Lastly, Floor was constantly worrying about the situation with her co-founder. In which, her LP provided emotional support by reassuring her of her capabilities, and helping deal with her feelings. Furthermore, he connected Floor with excellent lawyers out of his personal network. By first providing emotional support, he helped Floor with emotionally coping with the situation. After which, Floor was able to split with her former co-founder and made use of Thomas his personal network. Thus, the instrumental support led to PFC.

## **5.4 Conceptual Framework**

As stated, LPs who would provide emotional and instrumental support increased the entrepreneur's personal resources, which in turn helped them to better cope with the stress and assisted them in utilizing one of the three coping mechanisms. LPs who provided instrumental support significantly assisted the entrepreneur in utilizing PFC. This instrumental support best helps as it provides the entrepreneur with the needed resources and tools to tackle the problem. Examples of these resources provided by LPs are: time, money, network, skills and knowledge (Pierce et al., 1996). Furthermore, emotional supportive partners helped best with strengthening the entrepreneur's psychological capital. This increase in psychological capital of the entrepreneur, assisted the entrepreneur to utilize EFCM and MFCM. Thus, emotional support boosts psychological capital through self-efficacy, perception, comfort and calmness, which is in line with the findings of Bulmash (2022).

Building upon the analysis throughout all cases, the researchers have identified that the use of EFCMs and MFCMs can lead to PFCMs. The cases showed that the stress could cloud the thought processes of entrepreneurs who were unable to come up with solutions to address the stress. By utilizing either MFC or EFC, the entrepreneurs were able to critically assess the stress, which allowed them to come up with ways to tackle the problem, this led them to use PFCMs. As stated by Lazarus & Folkman (1984), PFCMs are most effective in situations where the stress is controllable in a certain degree. Thus, by first utilizing EFCMs and MFCMs, the entrepreneurs are

better able control the stress, which eventually allows them to utilize PFC. PFC is the most effective coping mechanism as it solves the problem by its root cause, whereas meaning and emotional focused mainly suppress and change the perception of the problem (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Lastly, straining LPs decreased the personal resources and the psychological capital of the entrepreneur. Wherefore the entrepreneur lost part of their ability to properly cope with the stress. As the straining caused by the LP, could demand, time, money, effort, and confidence which are considered valuable resources needed to cope. Thus, straining LPs reduced the coping capabilities of the entrepreneur, which could potentially lead to an increase in stress. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), a situation is stressful if the resources at hand are insufficient to adapt to a change in environment. The findings of the analysis led to new insights in terms of how LPs influence the different SCMs of the entrepreneur. As previously, the LP mainly influences the psychological capital and personal resources of the entrepreneur, both of which are vital to utilize SCMs. An overview of how this influences the entrepreneurial SCMs is shown below.

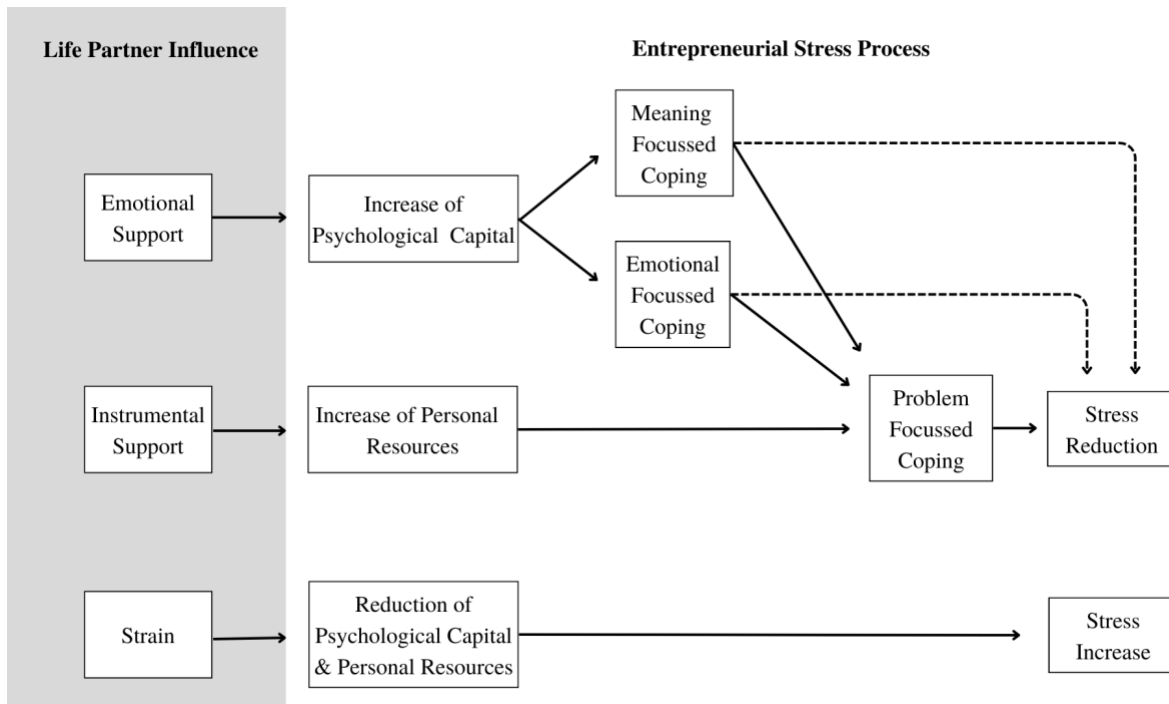


Figure 3. Conceptual framework of life partner influence on entrepreneurial stress processes

## 5.5 Other findings

The outcomes of the analysis of the cases shows how different stressors in venture creation result in high perception of stress among entrepreneurs. This thesis therefore acknowledges that stress among entrepreneurs during the venture creation phase is inevitable. The stress can occur from within the venture, social and financial, or occur through external situations such as a global pandemic which complies with the stress definition of Holmes & Rahe (1967), who state that stress is a change in environment both external or internal. Additionally, this thesis acknowledges the findings of Boyd & Gumpert (1983) and Buttner (1992), whom state that stress is a fundamental part of the entrepreneurial journey. Lastly, the findings have shown that entrepreneurs get stressed because of venture related occurrences, which is in line with White & Gupta (2020), who claim that the entrepreneur is tied financially and psychologically to their venture.

Furthermore, the length of the relationship appeared to influence the type of LP influence. Wherein it was noticed that LPs that have been together longer were more open, but also considered to be more straining. This could be explained by various reasons. First, the couples were more open and honest about their relationship as they did not feel the need to hide anything. Yet another reason could be that entrepreneurs which are engaged in a longer relationship are more risk averse as they would like to have a more stable basis. Lastly, more mature relationships allow the couples to be less inclined to hold their opinion.

Additionally, there was a noticeable difference between male and female entrepreneur with regards to support. In which the researchers notices that female entrepreneur received more supported compared to male entrepreneurs. One of the reasons could be that female entrepreneurs have a higher need for an accommodating relationship as was identified by Bulmash (2022). Furthermore, as identified by Marlow & Patton (2005), female entrepreneurs are still hindered by outdated believes and values that influence their support from professional environments, which in turn could increase their need for support in their personal environment. However, most female entrepreneurs in the dataset were all novice entrepreneurs. Adding to this, some female entrepreneurs in the dataset had a LP that already had experience in entrepreneurship. Thus, making the LP a valuable and approachable source of information and support. Concluding, it is



not possible to draw findings on whether the gender influenced the need for support, or that there were underlying causes. Further research should be conducted on this matter.

# 6. Conclusion

## 6.1 Research Conclusion

This thesis aimed to identify how LPs influence entrepreneurial SCMs during the venture creation phase. This thesis adds to the existing field of entrepreneurial research in three ways. Firstly, by elaborating how LP support and strain can influence the entrepreneur during the venture creation phase. Secondly by contributing to the understanding of how entrepreneurial SCMs can best be utilized. Thirdly, by elaborating on how LPs may influence entrepreneurial SCMs.

Regarding the first contribution, LP influence can be either supportive or straining. When the LP is straining, the LP reduces the psychological capital and personal resources of the entrepreneur, this is in agreement with the findings of Bulmash (2022). In line with Lazarus & Folkman (1984), personal and psychological resources are critical for the entrepreneur to address a change in environment or stress. Thus, a reduction in these personal and psychological resources will increase the stress levels of the entrepreneur. Wherein it is beneficial for the entrepreneur to have a LP which provides low strain, especially within the venture creation phase. On the other hand, in line with the findings of Bulmash (2022), a LP can provide support, which in turn, leads to an increase in personal and psychological resources. The findings of this study have shown that emotional support will provide the entrepreneur with an increase in psychological capital. This consists of self-efficacy, perception, comfort, and calmness. Whereas instrumental support will increase the entrepreneur's personal resources consisting of time, money, skills, network and knowledge. As mentioned above, these personal and psychological resources are critical in the entrepreneurs ability to successfully utilize SCMs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Secondly, this thesis contributes by understanding how entrepreneurial SCMs can best be utilized to limit stress among entrepreneurs. As identified after the analysis and in line with the research conducted by White & Gupta (2020), entrepreneurs can make use of three types of SCMs; meaning, emotional and problem focussed. These three coping mechanisms are classified as the most beneficial SCMs by Lazarus & Folkman (1984). As suggested by literature and seen in the analysis, problem focussed coping was the most used SCM. PFCMs tackles the source of the stress rather than suppressing or changing the perception of the stress (EFCMs and MFCMs).

Interestingly, the analysis found that a substantial amount of entrepreneurs were initially unable to use PFCMs as they perceived the stressor to be too difficult to address. In which, entrepreneurs utilized MFCMs and EFCMs, this helped them to suppress and change the perception of the stressor. Whereafter, the entrepreneurs were able to utilize PFCMs as they perceived their personal resources to be sufficient to tackle the root cause of the stress. This was not found in the theoretical framework and is a novice finding which contributes to a better understanding of entrepreneurial SCMs.

Thirdly, this thesis contributes by providing an answer to the following research question.

*How do life partners influence entrepreneurial stress coping mechanisms within the venture creation process?*

As mentioned above, LPs may support or strain the entrepreneur which influences the psychological capital and personal resources of the entrepreneur. The findings indicated that an increase of psychological capital, aids the entrepreneur to successfully utilize MFCMs and EFCMs. Both these SCMs can suppress or positively change the perception of the stress. Furthermore, these mechanisms can result in the entrepreneur to utilize PFCMs which is used to tackle and reduce the stress. This is as EFCMs and MFCMs will reduce the negative perception of the stress, allowing the entrepreneur to successfully assess and tackle the root cause of the stress. Furthermore, instrumental LP support leads to an increase in the entrepreneur's personal resources. This increase in the entrepreneur's personal resources aids the entrepreneur to utilize PFCMs and address the stress at its source, this leads to a reduction of stress. Lastly, a LP can negatively influence the entrepreneurial SCM by being straining towards the entrepreneurs, in which, LPs demand the entrepreneur to use their personal and psychological resources elsewhere. This reduces the personal and psychological resources available for the entrepreneur to use SCMs, which may lead to an increase of stress.

## **6.2 Theoretical implications**

The outcomes of this thesis generated various theoretical implications. First, this thesis acknowledges the findings of Bulmash (2022), who described that LP support has a positive

influence on entrepreneurial psychological resources, whereas LP strain has a negative effect on entrepreneurial psychological resources. Furthermore, the findings suggest support for the LP typologies and their positive and negative perception from the entrepreneur provided by Bulmash (2022).

Additionally, this thesis found support and builds upon the SCMs provided by Lazarus & Folkman (1984). The authors found support that during the venture creation phase, PFCMs are best utilized to reduce stress. Furthermore, this thesis contributes to the understanding of how these coping mechanisms function, by proposing that EFCMs and MFCMs function as tools that allow the entrepreneur to successfully utilize PFCMs.

Lastly, this thesis contributes to entrepreneurial research as it provides an understanding of how LPs may influence the entrepreneur during the venture creation phase in a novel way. Especially by examining how the LP may influence entrepreneurial SCMs, which is a critical factor in venture creation (Baron, Franklin & Hmieleski, 2016).

### **6.3 Practical implications**

The practical implications are threefold. SCMs and LP support are two important factors one should consider while starting or running a venture, as LPs have a large influence on entrepreneurial activities. Wherefor, this thesis advises entrepreneurs to be aware of how LPs can strain and support (emotional, instrumental), and how this support or strain influences the entrepreneur to cope with stress. Furthermore, this thesis emphasizes the importance of maintaining open and honest communication between the LP and the entrepreneur. As it was identified that open communication allowed the entrepreneur to vent and receive honest and useful advice on entrepreneurial dilemmas.

Thirdly, this thesis provides a baseline for LPs of entrepreneurs while explaining what type of support or strain influences stress. Straining LPs may result in an increased level of stress among entrepreneurs, whereas LP support helps benefit the entrepreneur and overall reduces stress levels during the venture creation phase.

## **6.4 Recommendations for future research**

To build upon a better understanding of how LPs influence entrepreneurs, this thesis identified three recommendations for future research. First, this thesis was unable to further investigate how straining LPs negatively impacted entrepreneurial coping mechanisms. The authors noticed that within the dataset, some LPs were straining, yet entrepreneurs managed to successfully cope with stress related to their venture. Furthermore, the data hinted that the more mature relationships experienced more strain. Wherefor it is beneficial to understand why the more mature relationships cause higher strain and lastly to further investigate how strain effects the entrepreneur.

Secondly, this research was conducted in a specific and geographical scope, namely, entrepreneurs in the Netherlands who have recently started their venture. To gain a better understanding, the researchers suggest investigating the LP influence in later stages of the venture. Furthermore, as the needs of relationships may differ among various cultures, the authors suggest to replicate this study in countries with different cultures and lengths of partner relationships.

Thirdly, the authors suggest that more research should be conducted on how and when MFC and EFC may lead to the use of PFC. Furthermore, to identify how entrepreneurs can best utilize a combination of these coping techniques to tackle a stressor.

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# Appendix A

## Primary interview (entrepreneur)

### Introduction

As previously mentioned in the email, we are researching if and how life partners impact stress coping mechanisms among entrepreneurs during their venture creation phase. Since you agreed to hold an interview with us, we would like to ask you the following questions, that will contribute to gaining a better understanding of the phenomena.

- Could you tell us about the venture you have created?
  - What made you decide to start this venture?
  - Looking back on starting the venture how do you feel about it?
- Can you describe the relation with your life partner before starting your venture.
  - How did he/she feel about you starting a venture?

### Entrepreneurial stress

- How did you experience stress during the venture creation phase?
  - How did the stress influence you in the venture creation phase?
  - Can you describe a stressful situation related to the venture creation phase?
  - How did you deal with this stress?

### Coping mechanisms

- What are your feelings regarding talking with your partner about the stress you experience during the venture creation processes?
- How often do you speak with your partner about the stress?
- Are there topics related to work that you do not discuss with your partner?
  - Looking at the stressful situation you previously described: How did you inform your partner about the stress you experienced?
- Were you able to fully express your feelings towards your partner?
- Did your stress relieve after speaking with your partner?

- How was your life partner involved in the venture during the venture creation stage?
  - Did life partner notice you were facing higher stress?
  - Did he/she change their behavior towards you?
- How did your partner help you during the venture creation stage?
  - How did your partner help you during the more stressful periods during the venture creation?

### **Life partner typology**

#### Regarding support

- How did your life partner support you in the venture creation phase?
  - Can you name a few examples?
  - How do you feel about these?
  - How much could you rely on your partner for help in the venture creation?
  - How did your life partner support you in different ways besides helping with work?
- Can you describe a situation where your partner made you feel better during the venture creation stage?

#### Regarding Strain:

1. How did your life partner restrict you in the venture creation phase?
  - Can you name a few examples
  - How did you feel about this?
  - How demanding was your life partner during the venture creation phase?
- What type of demands did your life partner make during the venture creation phase?
  - Can you describe a situation where you felt that you lacked support from your partner?

# Appendix B

## Entrepreneurial stress

- How did your partner experience stress during the venture creation phase?
- How the stress influence your partner in the venture creation phase?
- Can you describe a stressful situation related to the venture creation phase?
- How do you feel the stress affected your partner?
- How did your partner deal with this stress?

## Coping mechanisms

- What are your feelings regarding talking with your partner about the stress he or she experienced during the venture creation processes?
- How often do you speak with your partner about the stress?
- Are there topics related to work that you do not discuss with your partner?
- How did your partner inform you about the stress he or she experienced?
- Was your partner able to fully express their feelings towards you?
- Does their stress relieve after speaking with you?
  
- Were you involved in the venture during the venture creation stage?
  - Did you notice that your partner was facing higher stress?
  - Did you change their behavior towards your partner?
- How did you help your partner during the venture creation stage?
  - How did you help your partner during the more stressful periods within the venture creation?
- Can you describe a situation where you made your partner feel better during the venture creation stage?
- Can you describe a situation where you did not support your partner

# Appendix C



SCHOOL OF  
ECONOMICS AND  
MANAGEMENT

## **The influence of life partners on entrepreneurial stress coping mechanisms**

By: Antonie Beuk & Jonathan Hoekstra

I acknowledge that I will participate in an interview and will answer questions which will be used to answer the research questions mentioned above. Furthermore, I give consent to record and transcribe the interview. I acknowledge that interview is held voluntary, and I have the right to decline and step out at any moment.

Due to the nature of the topic I am not obligated to answer a question and can skip a questions if I believe that this question is to sensitive. Furthermore, I give consent to conduct an interview with my partner. I know that the interviewers will not share any information with my partner and will not steer questions in a certain direction.

Furthermore, by signing below, I acknowledge and give consent that the interview will be conducted anonymously. Lastly, I give consent that the transcriptions will only be used for the thesis and will be stored anonymously. By signing below, I agree with all the above mentioned.

Name:

Email:

Date:

Signature: