

# Professional, Liminal and Entrepreneurial Identities

*Masters' Thesis*

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this thesis, an effort has been made to broaden current professional identity, liminal entrepreneurial identity and entrepreneurial identity research. By means of qualitative research in the form of narratives, fifteen Dutch entrepreneurs who worked for an employer before, have been interviewed about how they construct the difference between their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self. The research shows that entrepreneurs construct these differences by describing their role identity, identity conflicts and their emotional identity. Regarding role identity, the entrepreneurs described the perception of their changes according to their leadership role, self-confidence, dependency, importances in life, passion, flexibility, responsibility, sociality, freedom, self-focus, mindset, comfort zone, view on society and goals. According to identity conflicts, the entrepreneurs described the perception of their changes by their misfit, fights and arguments, creativity, doubtful social surrounding and work-life balance. The way how entrepreneurs constructed changes about themselves through their emotional identity were about the observation of their life and work satisfaction and emotions. This research has given concrete insights, explanations and examples by showing real-life quotations and stories on how entrepreneurs describe the difference between their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self. Although each participant has experienced his or her own unique change to becoming an entrepreneur, the results also illustrate that participants show similarities and opposites in their identity changes.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, it is shown that more and more professionals make the decision to start their own businesses and thus start an entrepreneurial career (Burton, Sørensen & Dobrev, 2016). Therefore, research about transitions of professionals who become entrepreneurs has received increasing attention (Duening & Metzger, 2017). Previous studies have shown that there are different push and pull factors that influence the choice of a professional to start with entrepreneurship, such as unsatisfactory working conditions (Abebe & Alvarado, 2018) and pursuing a higher income (Martiarena, 2019). Another important field within research on transition to entrepreneurship is about identities (Jones et al., 2018). Identities show how persons see and describe themselves according to their experiences, feelings, emotions and social positions (Ashforth, 2001). It has become clear that persons can have different identities simultaneously and that these identities can change over time (Brown, 2015). Studies about identities are important, because identities influence meaning, motivation and decision-making (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003 and Leitch & Harrison, 2016). Therefore, knowledge about identities can explain people's actions and behaviours (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; York et al., 2016 and Grimes, 2018).

When professionals make the decision to become entrepreneurs, the professionals face a transition from their professional identity towards their so-called liminal identity and eventually towards the entrepreneurial identity (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). The professional identity of an entrepreneur is the identity the entrepreneur had when he or she worked for an employer (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Liminal entrepreneurial identities are paradoxical, in-between identities and social positions that emerge after the professional identities, but before the entrepreneurial identities. It can be seen as a phase where people neither consider themselves as professionals nor as entrepreneurs (Beech, 2011). Liminal entrepreneurial identities give rise to a professional to develop a new identity and change current patterns of activity. The liminal transition from a professional to an entrepreneur can be difficult, because the process can lead to confusion over their own identities, routines and positions, because the non-entrepreneur finds his- or herself separated from current structures and ways of doing and being (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018, 2020). The entrepreneurial identity is the identity the entrepreneur currently has as an entrepreneur (Grimes, 2018). These three identities have been widely studied separately, for example by Barbour and Lammers (2015), Muhr, de Cock, Twardowska and Volkmann (2019) and Wagenschwanz (2021), but are not much studied

together. Since we do not know how the identity transitions work from professionals becoming entrepreneurs and how they change during these transitions, this study will help to overcome this and will therefore complement current identity transition research in the field of entrepreneurship.

Through qualitative research, fifteen different entrepreneurs from the Netherlands who have been professionals under employment before, will be interviewed by use of a narrative approach about the phase during which they became entrepreneurs. The aim of conducting interviews is to study the change in entrepreneurs' previous professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities. Consequently, the research question of this thesis is stated as follows: *"How do entrepreneurs construct the difference between their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self after becoming an entrepreneur?"*

To answer the research question, this thesis is structured into different sections. First, an overview will be given of the theory about professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities. In this theoretical framework, the constructs 'Entrepreneur', 'Entrepreneurial Identities and Narratives', 'Professional Identities and Narratives', 'Liminal Entrepreneurial Identities', 'Identity Conflicts' and 'Emotional Identity' will be discussed. Second, the methodology that is used to conduct this research will be further explained. Third, the results that came out of the study will be shown. Finally, this study will conclude with a discussion and conclusion. Moreover, the limitations of this research will be discussed and suggestions for future research will be given.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this section, the theoretical framework of this thesis will be presented. To examine what the changes in the entrepreneurs' professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities are, it is first important to elaborate and explain the different concepts that are related to this study. Different key terms have been developed that have been used in different literature databases. An effort has been made to use the most recent literature so that this study can serve as an addition to the latest existing literature. Efforts were also made to use literature that has been cited frequently in other research. The literature that emerged from this search process is used to identify the concepts 'Entrepreneur', 'Entrepreneurial Identities and

Narratives', 'Professional Identities and Narratives', 'Liminal Entrepreneurial Identities', 'Identity Conflicts' and 'Emotional Identity'.

## **2.1 Entrepreneur**

Many researchers have discussed the definition of an entrepreneur which have led to many differentiations of the meaning of an entrepreneur. Some frequently occurring definitions of an entrepreneur will be discussed in this section.

One of the first and therefore oldest definitions of an entrepreneur was established by researchers more than a hundred years ago. A well-known researcher in the field of entrepreneurship, Schumpeter (1911), came up with the definition of an entrepreneur as someone who starts an enterprise that displaces old businesses by the creation and introduction of new goods, services and production processes. Later, during the early stage of the traditional economics discipline, the entrepreneurship literature defined an entrepreneur as someone who focuses on profitable market opportunities that emerged after an imbalance in the market's demand and supply positions (Casson, 1982 and Kihlstrom & Laffont, 1979). The definitions listed so far can be seen as the traditional definitions of an entrepreneur.

Besides these traditional definitions, there are also some simple definitions that are accepted as a definition of entrepreneur. Researchers who are attracted to this field, such as Alvarez (2005), Bird and Schjoedt (2009) and Mahto and McDowell (2018), state that everyone who starts an own business can be called an entrepreneur.

In addition, there are also researchers who differentiate between types of entrepreneurs so that therefore entrepreneurs can be specified to a particular category of entrepreneurs. Martínez, Bañón and Laviada (2019) for example, differentiate between social and non-social entrepreneurs. They explain that a non-social entrepreneur is someone who identifies opportunities in the market and then makes the decision to create a business with the goal of taking ownership of the income that is generated in a novel or creative way. The social entrepreneur is more than that, because a social entrepreneur starts a business with the goal of solving social problems and therefore takes for example philanthropic and environmental issues into account.

Furthermore, Østergaard (2019) states that there are three types of people owning a business: the self-employed, the business owner and the entrepreneur. By means of similarities and dissimilarities in personality characteristics, people are assigned to a particular category. The self-employed are not interested in employing others and prefer to work alone in professions that are similar to others, for example in hairstyling. They do not need to innovate and have a strong target orientation. Self-employed maintain a work-life balance and spur growth in local environments. The business owner is someone who leads companies with more employees with different backgrounds and educational levels. Business owners are also not interested in innovation, but adapt to a certain degree to stakeholder demands. The category entrepreneur differs greatly from the self-employed and business owner, because this research concludes that an entrepreneur is very innovative, creative and flexible and differs especially in leadership preferences.

These types of entrepreneurs are some examples, but many more researchers have discussed different types of entrepreneurs (Anokhin et al., 2008; Block & Wagner, 2010 and Zhang & Acs, 2018).

The definition of entrepreneur that is chosen for this research is the definition that is used by Alvarez (2005), Bird and Schjoedt (2009) and Mahto and McDowell (2018): “Entrepreneurs entail all the people that have their own business.” This definition has been chosen because different kinds of entrepreneurs are interviewed to conduct this research. No distinction is made between types of entrepreneurs, the size of their businesses and in which field they operate. Research about changes in the entrepreneurs’ professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities is a new field and therefore interviewing all types of entrepreneurs serves as a solid base for this research.

## **2.2 Entrepreneurial Identities and Narratives**

Entrepreneurial identities is a widely researched concept in business and management research (Mmbaga, Mathias, Williams & Cardon, 2020). In this section, different definitions and theories of entrepreneurial identities will be discussed. It is important to mention that literature uses the term founder identity as well, but to not cause confusion, the term entrepreneurial identity will be used.



According to Yitshaki and Kropp (2016), an entrepreneurial identity is composed of two different perspectives: the role identity and the social identity. The role identity is about the interpretation of an individual of what it means to be an entrepreneur (Powell & Baker, 2017). The social identity is about the interpretation of an individual's self, due to a membership in a specific social group (Powell & Baker, 2017). Some examples of research about the role identity as well as the social identity will be discussed now.

Following Grimes (2018), an entrepreneur associates with a particular role identity, the so-called entrepreneurial identity. An entrepreneurial role identity can be explained as how an individual understands who he or she is and who he or she wants to be as an entrepreneur. According to Shepherd and Haynie (2009), entrepreneurial role identities can be described as meanings and interpretations that characterize entrepreneurs, give them a unique identity, and guide and motivate them with fitting role behaviours. Furthermore, experiences the entrepreneur faces during his or her career, is an important factor as well to develop his or her entrepreneurial role identity (Shepherd & Hayne, 2009).

Hoang and Gimeno (2010) have researched the role identity of an entrepreneur as well. They developed a construct of entrepreneurial identity in which they demarcate how identity centrality and identity complexity influences an individuals' ability to quit a work or job role and start with founding or entrepreneurial activities. The switch from one role to another role is called a role transition.

Identity centrality describes to what degree an individual feels his- or herself attached to a particular entrepreneurial role and shows how individuals differ in motivation to undertake and persevere in challenging transitions. For example, individuals who see themselves as creative people are more likely to use this creativity in their entrepreneurial activities and individuals who adopt a healthy lifestyle are less likely to start a business in the fast food industry (Hoang & Gimeno, 2010).

Identity complexity describes to what degree an individual defines their entrepreneurial role in terms of diversity and richness. Identity complexity clarifies patterns in how and when an individual's perseverance occurs. For example, some individuals focus on bringing a new product

or service to the market, while others view their role in managerial terms, using their marketing, financial and managerial skills (Hoang & Gimeno, 2010).

A well-known entrepreneurial social identity classification is developed by Fauchart and Gruber (2011) and concerns three types of entrepreneurial social identities: the Darwinian identity, the Communitarian identity and the Missionary identity. This classification of three types of entrepreneurial identities have been tested and applied in other research about entrepreneurs (Alsos et al., 2016 and York et al., 2016).

The first identity, the Darwinian identity, includes individuals whose primary focus is to develop strong, profitable businesses. They focus primarily on activities that provide benefits to the company's success. The motivation surrounding Darwinians is primarily about making profit and increasing their personal wealth. Darwinians are also characterized by taking a business school approach when setting up their businesses and adhere strongly to solid business principles. Moreover, Darwinians focus on competitors and try to differentiate from them.

The second identity, the Communitarian identity, includes individuals who enter an entrepreneurial field when they realize that their products or services may also be of interest to certain other community members. Communitarians are getting enthusiastic when they can contribute to the community with innovative products and services and use the support they receive from the community as a motivation to continue. Communitarians believe that being unique and authentic is of great value to their businesses.

The third identity, the Missionary identity, includes individuals who feel that they can have a major impact on important, social change. Their businesses are developed with the idea of being able to bring out their views about society, nature and politics, for example. Missionaries believe that they have a positive influence on the well-being of others and try to make the world a better place by acting responsibly, transparently and empathetically.

A lot of other research on entrepreneurial identities is about the identification of common characteristics between entrepreneurs, but also about the fact that an entrepreneur can form their own identity by prioritizing their different entrepreneurial characteristics, motivations and behaviors (Cardon et al., 2009 and Murnieks et al., 2014).

An entrepreneurial identity is not an identity that remains constant over time, but an entrepreneurial

identity forms and evolves due to experiences, aspirations and events that an entrepreneur witnesses (Giddens, 1991; Baron, 2006 and Hoang & Gimeno, 2010). This is an interesting point, because it indicates that to a certain extent a person is able to adapt to certain situations and environments.

Other studies have also shown that organizational actions are influenced by entrepreneurial identities (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011 and York et al., 2016). For example, if an entrepreneur sees him- or herself as a green activist, he or she is more likely to sell products out of environmental-friendly sources.

Another concept that has received increasing attention is the utilization of narratives in entrepreneurial identity work (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Down & Warren, 2008 and Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). In earlier years, narratives have been identified as an important concept in the formulation of the self and have the characteristic to change over time (Giddens, 1991 and Somers, 1994). Narratives in entrepreneurial studies have gained attention after epistemological foundations were laid by Steyaert and Bouwen (1997). However, narratives have not been widely used in research about role transitions, while narratives are seen as helpful to identify the difference between who someone has been and who they have become (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

Identity narratives or stories play an important role in the phase of entrepreneurial identity construction and formulation, because identity narratives make sense to certain events and actions taken by the entrepreneur (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). In other words, the goal of identity narratives is that narratives give meaning to identity claims of an entrepreneur and make therefore the actions of an entrepreneur better understandable (Navis & Glynn, 2011). According to Fenton and Langley (2011), narratives give meaning to practice that arises from sensemaking events, narratives give sense to direction of purpose and narratives enable and constrain actors' ongoing activities. Moreover, narratives are helpful to better understand practices of strategy.

Phillips et al. (2013) have used shared identity narratives to investigate how an entrepreneur founded and grew a successful venture by the utilization of a portfolio with strongly homophilous, dyadic ties. Narratives in the form of clichés have been used by Down and Warren (2008) to research the creation and maintenance of entrepreneurial identities. Zhang and Chun (2018) have

used narratives to explain how immigrants in Canada explain the changes towards forming their entrepreneurial self. Some other examples of researchers who have also used narratives in entrepreneurial identity work are Navis and Glynn (2011), Driver (2017) and Frederiksen and Berglund (2020).

In this thesis narratives will also be used to complement current research about narrative entrepreneurial identity work. Narratives will be used to enable the entrepreneur to go back in time to reflect on the transition from his or her professional self to his or her current entrepreneurial self. By going back in time in the mind of the entrepreneur and telling about that situation, the entrepreneur is able to bring back experiences and feelings from the past. Among rhetorical strategies, it is shown that telling a good story helps people to generate meaning (Gergen, 1994; MCAdams, 1999) and it raises the likelihood that their claims about identity will be granted (Ashforth, 2001). As a result, narratives will be able to help even better construct the difference between the entrepreneur's previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self.

In summary, entrepreneurial identities are characteristics that make a person or other entity unique and identifiable as an entrepreneur. Moreover, entrepreneurial identities guide and motivate the entrepreneur's behaviour (Grimes, 2018). It is shown that one could think of entrepreneurial identities in the form of role identities and social identities. In this thesis, the focus would be on the role identities of an entrepreneur as described by Hoang and Gimeno (2010). The role identity shows how an individual understands who he or she is and who he or she wants to be as an entrepreneur. In this thesis, there will also be considered how experiences have influenced the changes in the entrepreneurs' professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities. Because of the fact that the difference between the entrepreneur's previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self will be constructed, it is important to compare the change of the role identity of the entrepreneur's previous professional self with the role identity of the entrepreneur's current self. In this thesis, the focus will not be on social identities, because the main purpose of this study is to identify how entrepreneurs construct their own changes on behalf of their perceived roles and not on behalf of their own perception compared to a specific, social group. Furthermore, a narrative approach will be used to identify the identity change of the entrepreneur.

### **2.3 Professional Identities and Narratives**

Now the entrepreneurial identities have been described, a description of the professional identities will be given as well. Lots of research has been done on the topic of professional identities. Some examples of researchers that have investigated the practices and strategies that individuals use to construct their professional identities are Coupland (2001), Dutton, Roberts and Bednar (2010), Ibarra (1999), Kuhn (2006) and Watson (2009). Professional identities are in literature also called work identities, vocational identities, occupational identities and career identities (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). In this thesis, the term professional identities is used.

Professional identities have gained several definitions by different researchers. In the most simplistic form, a professional identity can be defined as the conscious awareness of how an individual sees his- or herself as a worker (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). However many perspectives have been used to describe professional identities, only two of them can be seen as widely used in later research (Alvesson, 2010). On the one hand, the personality-theory-based approach says that a professional identity contains the perception of an individual towards his or her professional goals, values, interests and abilities (Kielhofner, 2007). On the other hand, the psychosocial approach says that a professional identity shows a complex structure of meanings where an individual searches for a fit of their motivation and competencies with specific professional, career roles (Meijers, 1998).

According to Depolo et al. (1992), a professional identity is developed by the so-called concepts socialization for work and socialization by work. Socialization for work are the values, attitudes and cognitive capacities an individual requires before entering the professional, working world. Socialization by work are the personal qualities that an individual develops when he or she is in the professional, working world.

Taking earlier findings about professional identities into consideration, Brown, Kirpal and Rauner (2007) have identified the most important characteristics of modern, professional identities. They show that professional identities are characterized both by continuity and change. This is backed up by Brown (2015), who argues that professional identities, just as other forms of identities, are not stable over time. Furthermore, professional identities are formed by changed interpersonal relationships around which professional identities are constructed. Moreover, individuals' self-

identities serve as a contribution to the construction of their professional identities (Kroger, 2007 and Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007), but professional identities can to some extent vary from individuals' self-identities (Brown, Kirpal & Rauner, 2007). Last, social-economic structures and processes could constrain the development of professional identities (Oyserman & James, 2011).

Because several researchers have shown that individuals' self-identities can be seen as a component of the development of professional identities, research has been done to identify the reasons for this. Thompson & Mc Hugh (1995) identified that the development of a professional identity is a complex process which begins in childhood. It has been stated that experiences from childhood to adulthood have an effect on the forming of one's self-identity and therefore is the professional identity also affected by these experiences. It is about the understanding of who one is and wishes to become (Flum & Blustein, 2006; Kroger, 2007; Skorikov, 2007 and Vondracek et al., 1999). The reason why a child is able to construct a part of his or her professional identity already, is because children identify with adults and accept a professional identity assigned by others (Kalil, Levine & Ziol-Guest, 2005). Kielhofner (2007) shows that the development of a professional identity is a lifelong process of constructing, shaping and reshaping an individual as a worker.

Other factors that are also important for the development of a professional identity are individual factors, like personality and gender, and contextual factors, like family, peers, schools and college (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007).

A well-developed professional identity is also important for the development of one's future career. A professional identity helps an individual to make relatively easy, rational and mature career decisions (Saunders et al., 2000). A professional identity provides an individual direction and meaning and helps with goal setting and self-assessment (Solberg, Close & Metz, 2002).

In the section about entrepreneurial identities is spoken about the utilization of narratives in research about entrepreneurial identities. Narratives are also used in research about professional identities, by for example Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu (2010) and Pratt et al. (2006).

In summary, when thinking about professional identities in this thesis, professional identities are identities of an individual who works for an employer. The professional identity is a component of an individual's self-identity and can be developed, customized, changed and shaped over time. Professional identities are the roles that employees adopt and correspond to in ways how employees behave when performing their work (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). As said earlier in the Entrepreneurial Identities and Narratives part, there will also be considered how experiences have influenced the changes in the entrepreneurs' professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities.

## **2.4 Liminal Entrepreneurial Identities**

Now the entrepreneurial identities and professional identities are described, it is time to dive a little deeper into the field of liminal entrepreneurial identities.

Genep (1960) was the first person who used the term liminal to indicate the middle phase of a transition. He stated that a transition consists of three different phases: separation, liminality and incorporation. Separation indicates the end of the previous identity and social position while incorporation indicates the new identity and social position. The liminality phase indicates the in-between position between two different roles. Later, Turner (1977) developed this three-phase concept further and identified that this three-phase concept is not only important to identify the in-between phases, but that it also helps to understand reactions of people when they experience liminality. According to Turner (1977), liminality can shape an individual's personality, thoughts and experiences.

Researchers such as Garcia-Lorenzo et al. (2018) have built further on Turner's liminality concept. Their paper explores liminal entrepreneuring by studying the transition from un(der)employment to entrepreneurship of fifty nascent necessity entrepreneurs in socio-economic crises. In the paper is shown how the nascent necessity entrepreneurs dismantle their social positions and identities and how they experiment with alternate visions of themselves and new relationships. The paper also reveals how the entrepreneurs use entrepreneuring practices and ideas in a new way, using organization-creation practices and imagination to rebuild both context and self. Beech (2011) has also extended research about the liminality concept, more specifically liminality

in the identity construction and work literature. Beech focuses on the change process of an individual, especially the moment when the individual is in between two different identity constructions. To this extent, the individual is neither one thing nor the other. Another researcher that has built further on the concept of liminality is Garsten (1999). She investigates in her paper the liminal phase, also called the betwixt and between phase, of temporary employees in Sweden and the US. The paper shows that understanding liminality of temporary workers is helpful since temporal and contractual flexibilization of work becomes increasingly important.

The concept of liminality in entrepreneurial identity research concerns an individuals' condition or process within a transition between two different roles. It is a condition or process where an individual faces his or her different social positions and in-between identities, that later causes them to create a new identity and renounce their current way of doing things (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2020). In this thesis, the focus will be on the changes of entrepreneurs' previous professional identities, their liminal identities and their current entrepreneurial identities.

## **2.5 Identity Conflicts**

Identity conflicts can be defined as conflicts between norms, demands, values and beliefs that are intrinsic for individual and group identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Since this study focuses on individuals, this section will go a little deeper into identity conflicts of individuals that are called intra-unit identity conflicts as well. Intra-unit identity conflicts are conflicts between the values, norms, beliefs and expectations of an individual about the question who he or she is as an individual (Horton, Bayerl & Jacobs, 2014).

Much research has been done about how identity conflicts arise. According to Hirsh and Kania (2015) for example, identity conflicts arise when individuals have two or more identities that clash together. The values, norms, beliefs and expectations of one identity do not match with the values, norms, beliefs and expectations of the other identity. Regarding this study it can be said that identity conflict can arise when the entrepreneurs' professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities or entrepreneurial identities clash with their personal identities. Identity conflicts not only arise because of a conflict between two or more identities of one individual, but can also



develop when the identity of an individual does not match with the identity of someone or else, for example the identity of a colleague, a manager or an employer (Ashforth, Rogers & Korley, 2011). Furthermore, identity conflicts can be created when an individual's identity does not fit with the norms and values of an organization where the individual is part of or works for (Creed, DeJordy & Lok, 2010). Ibarra (1999) and Ladge, Clair and Greenberg (2012) state that identity conflicts can also arise because of specific life changes, such as parenthood and getting a promotion at work. These events can work as a trigger for a reassessment of an individual's identities where new roles and responsibilities can lead to a conflict in existing identities.

An individual is able to shape his or her self-identity to some extent, that it better aligns with his or her work situations (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). After that extent, individuals emphasize the roles and tasks that align with their deeper self-identities and struggle with the roles and tasks that do not align with their deeper self-identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Pratt et al. (2006) built further on the research of Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) and showed that an individual is able to craft his or her job to a certain extent, to align that with his or her self-identity. Lindebaum, Jordan and Dasborough (2012) argue that asymmetric relations between professional identities and self-identities can also be considered. This means that there is also a possibility that alignments between professional identities and self-identities have a negative effect, while misalignments between professional identities and self-identities can have a positive effect.

In this research, it will be examined which identity conflicts entrepreneurs have faced when they made the transition from being a professional towards becoming an entrepreneur and why these identity conflicts occurred.

## **2.6 Emotional Identity**

Emotions can be found in all aspects of life and it is an important element of how individuals describe themselves (Fineman, 2003 & Kleres 2009). Emotional identity can be defined as an identity that describes how an individual perceives his- or herself by looking at his or her handlings, behaviours, emotions and feelings (Stets, 2005). The emotions that arise when an individual faces identity struggles, identity conflicts or identity changes do belong to emotional identity theory (Winkler, 2018). In emotional identity theory it is often said that identity

congruence, or in other words, identity verification leads to positive emotions while identity incongruence, or in other words, lack of identity verification leads to negative emotions (Cast & Burke, 2002).

Researchers including Christiansen (1999) and Kroger (2007) argued that having a strong identity contributes to psychosocial well-being, adjustment and life satisfaction. Moreover, Kira and Balkin (2014) state that alignment between an individuals' professional identity, liminal entrepreneurial identity or entrepreneurial identity with an individual's self-identity is important for an individual's wellbeing. Both misalignments and alignments influence an individuals' emotions and cognitions, they motivate an individual's behaviour and they influence an individual's work performance (Kira & Balkin, 2014). When there is a misalignment between the professional identity, liminal entrepreneurial identity or entrepreneurial identity with an individual's self-identity, negative psychological consequences, such as the emergence of negative emotions and feelings, can arise. (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). When there is an alignment between the professional identity and self-identity, the individual is more likely to experience his or her work as being meaningful (Ménard & Brunet, 2011) and it has a positive influence on an individual's well-being (Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

In this study, emotional identity will be used to discover how and why the entrepreneurs' emotions, feelings and life and work satisfaction has changed during the transition of being a professional towards becoming an entrepreneur.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

In this section, the methodology that is used for this research will be explained. To investigate how entrepreneurs construct the difference between their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self after becoming an entrepreneur, qualitative research in the form of a narrative approach was used. Qualitative research was chosen, because there is still little knowledge about the change in entrepreneurs' professional identities, their liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities. Qualitative research can be used to provide the first information and knowledge about this concept before quantitative research can be done (Maruster & Gijnsberg, 2013).

Moreover, qualitative research helps to identify underlying thoughts and ideas of participants, because qualitative research answers the so-called ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions. Quantitative research makes it difficult to achieve this goal, as it involves limited response options (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Thus, qualitative research leads to more thoughtful answers than for example a survey in quantitative research (Maruster & Gijzenberg, 2013).

Furthermore, a list with interview questions was used to structure the narrative process. The advantage of qualitative research is that during a conversation with the participant, it is possible to deviate from the list with interview questions and discuss facets that have not been considered before. This is more difficult to achieve in quantitative research, as limited response options are often used (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

In addition, the advantage of qualitative research is that the participants could be asked afterwards to provide feedback about the way the research was done. This can help to improve following interviews with other participants (Queirós, 2017).

Field research was used where several entrepreneurs from different fields who have been professionals under employment before, talked about the difference between their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self. The entrepreneurs that are chosen for this study are fifteen Dutch entrepreneurs from different work fields: the health & lifestyle industry, the alternative medicine industry, the e-commerce industry, the cleaning industry, the public lighting industry, the marketing industry, the real estate industry, the consultancy industry, but also the technological and innovative industry. The choice was made to speak with entrepreneurs from different fields, because the expectation was that more insights could be gained when participants come from more different fields. More information about the fifteen participants can be found in the table in Appendix A.

The interviews with the entrepreneurs took place in different settings due to the COVID-19 situation and travel distance. Some participants agreed to have an interview in real life while other participants preferred to conduct the interview via a video call. The video calls were made via Google Conference.

Before the interview with an entrepreneur started, an introduction was given about what the interview would be about and where the interview would serve for. Moreover, it was explicitly

mentioned that the participant stays anonymous and permission was asked to record the interview for analyzing reasons. Thirteen participants agreed on recording the interview while two participants preferred for no recording because of personal reasons. In these two cases, notes have been made in a notebook to keep track of important information. Furthermore, it was told that the participants had the opportunity to ask questions and that they were allowed to withdraw from the interview at any time.

In the theoretical framework it is told that narratives are widely used in studies about identities. Because a narrative approach was used during these interviews as well, more information about narratives will be given now. According to Bruner (1986), Gabriel (2004) and Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010), taking a narrative approach is crucial in structuring human identities. Narratives can be described as written or spoken text that describe sequences of occurrences and actions (Maitlis, 2012). Narratives can be seen as a central way for people to describe and understand their experiences, feelings and emotions (McAdams, 1993 and Gergen, 1999). Some researchers argue that storytelling is the same as narratives, while other researchers think these two concepts can not be used interchangeably, because storytelling can be fictional (Gabriel, 2004). To not cause confusion, only the term narratives have been used in this study. Narratives have been seen as important in qualitative identity research since narratives serve as a meaning-making device for collected data (Chase, 2005).

A narrative approach was also used in this study, so that is the reason why this research method was more a natural conversation rather than an interview. However, a list with interview questions was set up that could be used during the interview in the case of silence for example, so open questions such as theme interviews were used for this narrative approach. These were handy in order to get answers to various questions regarding professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities, but also to offer space to go deeper into questions if that led to more insightful information for the research.

When the interviews with the participants started, the participants were asked to give a short introduction about themselves and their organization. Thereafter, the participants were asked what kinds of previous professional jobs they had. Next, the interviewees were asked to look back and reflect on the time when they changed from their previous career to entrepreneuring. The

interviewees were freely allowed to narrate their story about the change, while particular attention was paid to the way they described for example their experiences, their feelings and their emotions. This strategy was used to see if the participants would start talking about their professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities by themselves. In this way, an attempt was made to discover important changes in their professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities instead of asking questions to which some direction had already been given. The list with questions were only used when the conversations needed to go deeper and be more engaged. This has resulted in more validity to the research. The list with interview questions that sometimes was used during the interview can be found in Appendix B. At the end of the interviews, the participants were asked if they had any questions left and if they could provide some feedback about the interview. This feedback was used to improve following interviews with other participants.

After the interviews with the entrepreneurs were finished, the interviews were transcribed. No transcribing program has been used to transcribe the interviews, because manually transcribing serves as a way to give an extra insight into the data. Transcribing has only been done for the thirteen interviews with participants who gave the permission to record the session. The most important notes that have been used in the two cases where recording was not preferred, were put in an online document immediately after the interviews so that these could be added to the coding program as well. Important to mention is that recordings of the interviews, in accordance with the participants, will be deleted after completion of the colloquium, because of the promised anonymity. After making a transcript of each interview, the program ATLAS.ti has been used to analyse these transcripts. For analyzing the transcripts, the grounded coding theory has been used. The first step in this process was open coding. Several sentences, phrases and alineas were labeled with different codes. An effort was made to put the same topics under the same open codes as much as possible so that the overview of the data was maintained. In the end, 375 open codes have been identified with 1.400 quotations.

The second step in the coding process was axial coding. By axial coding, the 375 open codes were grouped over six different categories. The theoretical framework has been used to identify the most important categories. The six categories that were made up are: Information of Entrepreneur (36 open codes and 256 quotations), Entrepreneurs' Self-Perception (141 open codes and 770

quotations), Entrepreneurs' Personal Experiences (128 open codes, 823 quotations) and Entrepreneurs' Personal Goals (18 open codes and 177 quotations), Entrepreneurs' Personal Struggles (57 open codes and 426 quotations) and Entrepreneurs' Personal Feelings (11 open codes and 82 quotations).

The last step in the coding process was selective coding. The six different axial codes were labeled towards three different selective codes. The three selective codes that were made up are three concepts that are discussed in the theoretical framework: Role Identity, Identity Conflicts and Emotional Identity. Because of the fact that narratives were used as the qualitative research method, it was not known beforehand which topics and subjects the participants would talk about. After conducting some interviews, it became already a bit more clear which topics and subjects were discussed. It was also seen that participants experienced similar changes, but also contrary changes. During the coding process, an effort has been made to label the six axial codes to theory from the theoretical framework. Looking further into the axial codes and the theoretical framework, it became visible that the participants were talking about their role identity. As stated in the theoretical framework, the role identity shows how an individual understands who he or she is and who he or she wants to be. It is also stated that personal experiences can influence the way an individual's role identity is shaped. The four axial codes that belong therefore to the selective code Role Identity are Information of Entrepreneur, Entrepreneurs' Self-Perception, Entrepreneurs' Personal Experiences and Entrepreneurs' Personal Goals. In the theoretical framework it is also explained that there could be alignments and misalignments between different identities an individual can have. The struggles that come along with this phenomenon do belong to the identity conflicts theory. Therefore, the category Entrepreneurs' Personal Struggles is labeled to the selective code Identity Conflicts. Last, in the theoretical framework it is told about the emotions and the feelings an individual experiences during identity transitions and how that can influence work and life satisfaction. Therefore, the category Entrepreneurs' Personal Feelings is labeled to the selective code Emotional Identity.

The last step was to select which data was going to be used to explain the results. Because the participants talked about many different changes in their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self, it was not possible to explain all the data that was obtained. Therefore, it was needed to decide which data to use and which data not to use. Because of the fact that qualitative data can be hard to generalize, the decision has been made to only talk about changes that were

discussed by several participants. There were for example also many changes that were only described by one or two participants. Because this is difficult to generalize, the decision has been made to not use these less named changes. In the end, the section Role Identity in the results will discuss the topics leadership role, self-confidence, dependency, importances in life, passion, flexibility, responsibility, social, freedom, self-focus, mindset, comfort zone, view on society and goals. The section Identity Conflicts in the results will discuss the topics misfit, fights and arguments, creativity, doubtful social surrounding and work-life balance. Last, the section Emotional Identity in the results will discuss the topics life and work satisfaction and emotions. The coding diagram that gives an overview of the whole analyzing process can be found in Appendix C.

## **4. RESULTS**

In this section, the results of the qualitative research about the changes in entrepreneurs' professional identities, liminal identities and entrepreneurial identities will be given. To keep the overview, the results will be split up in three different sections according to the selective codes that are made up in the analyzing process. The first section will be about Role Identity, the second section will be about Identity Conflicts and the last section will be about Emotional Identity.

Each section will consist of one table and a part with text. In the table, the main findings will be presented in three columns: Professional Identity Phase, Liminal Identity Phase and Entrepreneurial Identity Phase. By doing this, an effort can be made to clearly display the changes the entrepreneurs have made during the three different phases.

The text underneath the table will further explain how the participants construct the differences between their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self by giving quotations and stories from participants. These quotations and stories will be interpreted and the findings will be concluded explicitly.

### **4.1 Role Identity**

In the Role Identity section, the identity changes will be shown according to the four categories Information of Entrepreneur, Entrepreneurs' Self-Perception, Entrepreneurs' Personal Experiences and Entrepreneurs' Personal Goals.

The Entrepreneurs' Personal Goals on row number fourteen will only be described in the Entrepreneurial Identity column, because this category gives a further explanation of who the entrepreneurs want to be as an entrepreneur.

**Table 1 - Main findings about Role Identity**

	<b>Professional Identity</b>	<b>Liminal Entrepreneurial Identity</b>	<b>Entrepreneurial Identity</b>
1.	<p>Leadership role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants had a leadership position, but did not perceive themselves as leaders.</li> <li>- Some participants had a leadership position and perceived themselves as leaders.</li> <li>- Some participants did not have a leadership position and were satisfied with that.</li> <li>- Some participants did not have a leadership position, but would have liked to be a leader.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants felt relieved, because they were able to take the leader role, but had to find out how to carry out that role.</li> <li>- Some participants who did not identify themselves as a leader, made the decision to start a business without employees.</li> <li>- Some participants who did not identify themselves as a leader, still had to be a leader when starting their business. Some of them tried to make that role fitting to their identity. Some participants still face difficulties with carrying out a leadership role.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants are used working as a freelancer without employees now and they feel that this fits them best.</li> <li>- Some participants are still struggling with their leadership role, because they still do not identify with this role.</li> <li>- Some participants have found their way on how to take the leadership role on them and are used to that now.</li> </ul>
2.	<p>Self-confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Because of being</li> </ul>



	<p>perceived themselves as unconfident while working for an employer. For example, they did not dare to express their own opinions and did not stand up for themselves.</p>	<p>had the feeling that they became less confident in the liminal phase, because of other people’s opinions about their businesses for example.</p>	<p>successful in their own business, the participants started to become more self-confident. They are more daring to stand up for themselves and do not care anymore what other people say.</p>
3.	<p>Dependency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All participants considered themselves as dependent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants struggled with the idea that they thought that they would perceive themselves as more independent after working for an employer, but in fact that was not the case. The participants rely on other parties, such as suppliers and customers, as well.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants consider themselves as more independent than when they worked for an employer.</li> <li>- Some participants still struggle with the fact that they perceive themselves not as independent as they would expect in an earlier stage.</li> </ul>
4.	<p>Importances in life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants were struggling with their personal identity when they had a professional role which could not fulfill the participants’ importances in life. For example, if the participant thought that helping other people was important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The participants who switched from a professional role where they were able to do things they think are important in life, to the entrepreneurial role where they were not able to do this, struggled with the alignment of their personal and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The participants are also struggling with their personal identity when their entrepreneurial role can not fulfill the participants’ importances in life. Some participants therefore miss their professional</li> </ul>

	<p>to them and they were not able to help other people during their professional job, that clashed with their personal identity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The participants who were able to express their importances in life during their professional job were more satisfied, because of the alignment with their personal identity.</li> </ul>	<p>entrepreneurial identity.</p>	<p>role.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The participants who are able to do what they think is important in their entrepreneurial role, feel more satisfied than when they had their professional job where that was not possible.</li> </ul>
5.	<p>Passion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants felt not passionate when carrying out their professional job. This led to less energy and less enthusiasm for example. They felt that work was an obligation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants who started to use their passion in their entrepreneurial job, got more energy and more enthusiasm. Work did not feel anymore like an obligation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants discovered that working and doing something that you are passionate about, can be compared. These participants describe it as they can go to work instead of they must go to work.</li> </ul>
6.	<p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants perceived themselves as being flexible.</li> <li>- Some participants did not perceive themselves as being flexible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants who did not consider themselves as flexible during their professional career faced that being flexible is a must for an entrepreneur. These participants faced difficulties with becoming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All participants consider themselves as being more flexible than during their professional career.</li> <li>- All participants think it is a must to be flexible as an entrepreneur</li> </ul>

		<p>more flexible, because they were used to structure and routine.</p>	<p>since you need to adapt to changing situations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants who did not perceive themselves as being flexible in their professional career, still struggle with being flexible, because they still feel the need for more structure.</li> </ul>
7.	<p>Responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants did not consider themselves as being responsible towards the organization they worked for during their professional career.</li> <li>- One participant considered himself as feeling more responsible towards the organization he worked for during his professional career than during his entrepreneurial career.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants considered themselves as being more responsible towards their own organization than for the organization of their previous professional job.</li> <li>- This resulted in realization why being responsible is important, also as a professional.</li> <li>- The one participant who considered himself as feeling more responsible for his previous professional job than for his current entrepreneurial job, started to feel more calm.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants consider themselves as being more responsible.</li> <li>- Participants with employees now face why it is important that employees also feel responsible. Because not all employees feel responsible, struggles arise between the participants and their employees.</li> <li>- The one participant who feels less responsible still perceives himself as responsible, but in a different manner. He feels that he is only responsible</li> </ul>

			towards himself and his employees which he got in his own hands. He is not responsible anymore towards a demanding manager or employer above him.
8.	<p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants perceived themselves as social beings. Working and socializing with other colleagues during their professional career fitted well with their personal identity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants started their own business as a freelancer and therefore started missing the social contacts they had during their professional career.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants who do not have employees have found their own ways to fulfill their strive for socializing with other people.</li> </ul>
9.	<p>Freedom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All participants considered themselves as having less freedom during their professional career.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the liminal phase, all participants came to the realization that becoming an entrepreneur can bring them more freedom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All participants consider themselves as having more freedom during their entrepreneurial career.</li> <li>- All participants have the feeling that their view on life has changed because of this.</li> </ul>
10.	<p>Self-focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants saw themselves as focusing too much on others instead of on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants realized that they were focusing too much on others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants started to focus more on themselves instead</li> </ul>

	<p>themselves.</p>	<p>instead of on themselves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants felt that they were not acting as themselves since they were following opinions and advice of others.</li> </ul>	<p>of on others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants started to not care what other people think of them and saw that chasing their own dreams is most important.</li> <li>- Participants rejected other people out of their lives if these people could not understand the entrepreneurs' focus on self.</li> </ul>
11.	<p>Mindset</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants perceived themselves as having a bad mindset and having negative thoughts when they were a professional.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants got in touch with like-minded people who were working on improving their mindset and getting rid of negative thoughts. These participants started to work on their mindset too and started to see themselves becoming more positive oriented.</li> <li>- Some participants had the feeling that they were having a worse mindset and more negative thoughts than they had as a professional, because of their own uncertainties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants perceive themselves as having a greater mindset and more positive thoughts as an entrepreneur than as a professional.</li> <li>- Working on a positive mindset has become a daily routine for some participants, because they feel better when they do that.</li> </ul>

<p>12.</p>	<p>Comfort zone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants saw themselves as persons who stayed in their comfort zone by only doing things where they felt comfortable with.</li> <li>- Therefore, most participants felt that they were not challenging themselves.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants had the idea that it was a must to go out of their comfort zones, because they felt that it was necessary to bring their own businesses to the next level.</li> <li>- This resulted in feeling anxious and stressed, because the participants were not used getting out of their comfort zones.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants perceive themselves as getting more out of their comfort zone as they did during their professional career.</li> <li>- However, they still think that getting out of their comfort zones feels sometimes scary and uncomfortable.</li> <li>- In contrast, the participants now see getting out of their comfort zones as a way to develop themselves.</li> </ul>
<p>13.</p>	<p>View on society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants described themselves as being more self-oriented than society-oriented, because with the money earned from their professional job they had to be self-sufficient first.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants still described themselves as being more self-oriented than society-oriented when they talk about money. Especially in the first phase of starting a business, not every participant made that much money and sometimes participants needed to use savings or loans to get the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the phase where the participants' businesses started to be successful, participants described themselves as even more self-oriented than society-oriented, because the money earned from the businesses were mainly used for personal belongings and for example</li> </ul>

		<p>business up and running.</p>	<p>expensive holidays.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- However, from a certain point, participants had the idea that having a lot of money, a lot of stuff, expensive houses and holidays were not satisfying the participants. They started to feel the urge that they wanted to give back to society in forms of volunteering, charity donating, sponsoring and helping with environmental problems.</li> </ul>
<p>14.</p>	<p>Goals</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The most stated goal was that some entrepreneurs would like to travel more for their business and private life to explore themselves and get to know more about other cultures.</li> <li>- Another personal goal that is mentioned several times is having more revenue sources to spread</li> </ul>

			<p>the risk of having just one revenue stream.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As mentioned before, giving back to society and doing some volunteer work is also a goal of some entrepreneurs.</li> </ul>
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#### **4.1.1 Leadership role**

Regarding the first change about having a leadership role, it is shown that some participants perceived themselves as leaders, while they did not have a leadership role. Participant B said:

*“During my professional career, I enjoyed giving people tasks and helping them, but I always had a manager above me which frustrated me. I got the feeling that I was not able to make my own decisions. Now I have my own business, I can finally be the leader that I always wanted to be.”*

In this citation, it seems that the participant perceives herself as a leader and that she is willing to take that role upon her. However, she did not have a leadership position during her professional career. Instead, she had to adhere to her manager while she would have liked to make her own decisions. Since she has her own business, it appears that she is able now to take a leading role upon her. Therefore, it can be said that she had to take a follower role during her professional career while she would have preferred to have a leadership role. Now with her own business, she changed from being a follower towards being a leader. Participant O said:

*“When I hired the first employees, I was happy that I could carry out the leader role I always wanted. But I must say that it was not easy in the start phase of my business, because it was more difficult than I expected. I had to find a sort of structure on how to successfully carry out that role.”*



It appears that Participant O does perceive herself as a leader, but that she has struggled with successfully carrying out that role, because she needed to experience in practice how she would be a good leader. There are also participants who do not perceive themselves as leaders, but need to take a leadership role upon them. Participant I said:

*“I have never been a leader in my whole life and now I am having my own company with my husband. I have to be a leader for all employees, but I do not feel like a leader. I am struggling with this, because I am always tempted to be a follower which sometimes results in employees walking all over me.”*

This citation shows that participant I does not perceive herself as a leader, but that she needs to fill in that role, because she has her own business now. Participant I is struggling, because she perceives herself as a follower, but instead she needs to be a leader. It could be said that she faces an identity crisis, because having a leadership role does not fit with her personal identity.

There are participants as well who did not perceive themselves as leaders and chose to start their own business without employees, so that they did not need to fulfill a leadership role. Participant J said:

*“I did not like the role as a manager. I had to lead several employees of a certain department and it brought so many difficulties and hassle. I had the feeling that I was always working harder than the others and every other day there was another struggle I had to deal with. The one day one person had a heartbreak, the other day another person was feeling sick. After four years I knew that being a leader was nothing for me”.*

It seems that Participant J does not perceive himself as a leader, because he struggles with problems that arise on the job with employees. He also thinks it is a struggle that he has the feeling that he is not at the same level as his employees, because he has the feeling that he is working harder. Later he said:

*“Because I knew that a leadership position was nothing for me, I decided to start my own company without employees, because I did not want to take that role on me again. It just did not fit me, because I can not handle all the hassle that comes along with being a leader.”*

Thus, it can be said that Participant J has chosen to start his own business without employees so that he does not have to take the leadership role upon him. It seems like a better fit with his personal identity.

#### **4.1.2 Self-confidence**

Looking at the second change about self-confidence, it is shown that most entrepreneurs felt unconfident when they worked for an employer. Most participants perceived themselves as even less confident when they ended up in the liminal phase. When the entrepreneurs started to become successful, they started to become more confident about themselves, because they had the feeling that they have proved themselves. Participant E said:

*“While working for an employer I was an unconfident person. I think that the reason therefore was that people always said to me that I am a failure and that I am not good enough. At some point in life I decided to fully focus on myself and to find my passion. I discovered that I had an entrepreneurial spirit, because I liked to turn a dime into a quarter. Once I started my own business, I made a profit from the beginning and actually never made a loss. Yes, this has made me so much more confident. I do not let anyone tell me what I need to do now.”*

Participant F said:

*“I was very insecure when I worked for an employer. I did not dare to stand up for myself and when all my colleagues wanted to go left, I also went left when in fact I wanted to go right. When I told people that I wanted to start my own business, I was afraid of what these people would think of me. They also asked why I would start my own business since that brings so many risks and insecurities. They even told me that I needed to find a real job and that my business would probably be a failure. I began doubting myself and became more unconfident, but nonetheless I started my own business which is going great now. Because of my own success I got so much more confidence. I am finally daring to stand up for myself and say what I want. I do not really care anymore what people think of me.”*

Participant O said:

*“To be honest, I was very insecure during my professional career. I was always scared that I would not satisfy my boss.”*

Thus, it can be said that entrepreneurs might perceive themselves as less confident when they make the transition from being a professional to becoming an entrepreneur. Once the first successes are achieved, entrepreneurs are able to perceive themselves as more confident.

### **4.1.3 Dependency**

Taking a closer look at the third change about dependency, one could say that all entrepreneurs considered themselves as dependent when working for an employer, because they always had to adhere to their managers and employers and were therefore not able to make their own decisions and take their own path. Participant A:

*“You are always dependent on someone else when you work for an employer. You must adhere to your managers’ or employers’ duties and it is difficult to take your own path. That can be frustrating when you have a good idea or you want to do a task differently.”*

Most entrepreneurs consider themselves as independent now they have their own business which gives them a more meaningful role, since they are able to decide when and where to work for example. Participant D:

*“The independence that I have now fits me way better than being dependent on others. I do not have a routine, so for me personally it is great to decide when I want to work and where I want to work. Sometimes I work very early in the morning and sometimes I work till very late at night. I can also go on a holiday when I want without consulting other people.”*

However, some entrepreneurs struggle with the fact that they are less independent than they expected when they wanted to become an entrepreneur, since they rely on other parties such as suppliers and customers. It is therefore not always possible to use their own ideas and make their own decisions. According to these entrepreneurs, this is something that they need to accept.

Participant E:

*“For a large part I can now work independently, but what I did not realize was that I am dependent on other people as well as an entrepreneur. During your professional job you are dependent on for example your employer and manager. When you are an entrepreneur you are dependent on your clients and suppliers for example. That is still difficult to deal with, because sometimes they have different ideas than I do. You can see the clients and suppliers as your current employer so to say. I think it is something that you need to accept, because you can not avoid it.”*

#### **4.1.4 Importances in life**

Most participants have discussed their change in identity because of importances in life. The following is said by Participant I:

*“During my professional career I worked as a nurse in a hospital. I always wanted to be a nurse, because I loved helping people and making people feel better. At some point I knew that I would take over a company with my husband that has nothing to do with helping and taking care of people. That is something that I still find difficult, because sometimes I feel like I would have been better off staying in healthcare, because that is really my passion. Considering the fact that I love helping people, I am responsible for the people that work in our company. When they do not feel well, I set them at ease and show that they are always allowed to come to me with their problems. When an employee is sick for a long term, I always come over to bring some flowers for example. But to be honest, if I were given the opportunity again to take over a company with my husband, I do not know if I would have done it again. Sometimes it is hard to realize that.”*

Moreover, Participant K said:

*“When I worked for a beauty company during my professional career, I was selling beauty products like mascaras. I did enjoy my work, but I did not know why our mascaras were better than for example a Dior mascara at the same price. I was not convinced about the products I was selling, because I was wearing other makeup products as well. I also felt a bit guilty towards customers because of this. The thing I missed in my professional career is that I was not able to help other people while I knew that was one of my passions. That is why I wanted to start my own business where I could help other people. I am so happy*

*now that I can help others, and that I can make them feel happier. That gives me so much energy. I finally identify with what I am doing, because it fits with who and how I am.”*

Looking at the previous two stories, it appears that when a person is able to fulfill his or her importances in life by his or her job, that they might consider this as a meaningful role. Participant I for example states that she loves helping people and making them feel better. Because she was a nurse during her professional career, she was able to do this. Participant K also thinks it is important to her to help other people. Since she was not able to help people with her professional job, she could see her professional job as less meaningful than her entrepreneurial job. Thus, it can be said that when entrepreneurs are able to make their professional or entrepreneurial identity closer to their personal identity, they may have the feeling that they are fulfilling a meaningful role. When it is not possible to align these roles with each other, entrepreneurs might feel that they fulfill a less meaningful role.

#### **4.1.5 Passion**

Considering the fifth change in identity because of passion, the following is said by Participant G:

*“During my professional career I talked about my job a lot with family and friends, but I was never very enthusiastic and I did not sound passionate. I also gave courses during my professional career. Now I am doing something for myself, I feel that I am so enthusiastic and energized when I talk about my work. I have realized that doing something that you like as your career has become so important for me. Since I am an entrepreneur I say that I am only doing nice things in life.”*

Besides that, Participant K said the following:

*“Beforehand I always had the feeling that I must go to work while it does not feel like an obligation anymore now I am doing something that I like. This mindset has changed since I started my own company, because earlier, work felt like an obligation. It was just something I had to do, because I needed money. Now I know that it is possible to compare both. Doing something that I like and where I can make money out of it.”*

The previous two participants show that when they are passionate about their work, that they feel more energized, more enthusiastic and work does not feel as an obligation. Just as with the previous change because of importances in life, being passionate about work could also result in entrepreneurs perceiving their role as more meaningful. Since most entrepreneurs stated that they did not feel passionate about carrying out their professional job, but do feel passionate about their entrepreneurial job, this can be linked to entrepreneurs perceiving their entrepreneurial role as more meaningful than their professional role.

#### **4.1.6 Flexibility**

The sixth change in identity about flexibility, shows that some entrepreneurs have changed to being more flexible in their entrepreneurial role than in their professional role. Participant D:

*“During my professional career, I perceived myself already as flexible, but now I am an entrepreneur I can see that I have become more flexible. For example, I am working on many projects at the same time, so I have to switch a lot between these projects. Therefore it is a must to be flexible. That is important for an entrepreneur.”*

This citation also shows that Participant D thinks it is important for an entrepreneur to be flexible, because she considers that as a must. Participant A has backed up this statement:

*“The world is changing fast and when you are an entrepreneur you need to be flexible to adapt to these changing situations. As an entrepreneur you are responsible for having a leading position with your company, otherwise you would not make it. For these reasons I had to learn to be more flexible than I was during my professional career and that is something I still find hard in some situations, because I personally sometimes feel the need for structure and routine.”*

Just as Participant A said in this quotation, some entrepreneurs who need to change to be flexible, but were less flexible before, face struggles with this, because they are for example used to structure and routine. Participant F experienced this as well:

*“Previously, when I worked for an employer, I was very structured and that worked fine for me. However, when I started my own business, everything was new for me and often took more time than expected. I structured my whole day, but when something was taking*

*longer than expected, I got an error in my head. After some time I realized that being so structured as I was is not handy as an entrepreneur, so I needed to become more flexible. I did that by saying to myself that it is not a big deal if I could not finish everything that I had planned. What I can not do today, I will do tomorrow. Moreover, as an entrepreneur you sometimes have to work on unexpected things that come in between your own schedule. Yes, being flexible is still something in which I must find my way, but I am learning every day.”*

In summary, the participants that talked about a change in their level of flexibility, all state that they have become more flexible as an entrepreneur than as a professional. Most participants also said that being flexible is a must for an entrepreneur. However, this change was not easy for everyone, because some entrepreneurs were used to structure and routine.

#### **4.1.7 Responsibility**

Regarding the seventh identity change in being and feeling responsible, most participants did not consider themselves as being responsible towards the organization they worked for during their professional career. However, when these participants made the transition to entrepreneurship, they did consider themselves as being responsible. Participant E:

*“When I worked for an employer I did not feel responsible at all. To be honest, I did not really care when something went wrong, because I felt not responsible for the thoughts of the clients. That was the duty of my manager and employer. Now I am an entrepreneur myself, I do have this responsibility and now I see how important responsibility is in an organization. I also have employees who do not feel that high level of responsibility, but I can not blame them. I understand what they feel, but that does not take away the fact that it is difficult to deal with.”*

It is shown that professionals might not feel responsible towards clients, because they feel that it is not their duty. As an entrepreneur, they get another role where they get that duty and therefore need to be more responsible. Besides that, entrepreneurs might come to the realization why it is important that employees feel responsible as well. Entrepreneurs might experience from the other side how it is if employees do not feel responsible and that can be difficult to deal with, since

entrepreneurs can understand why an employee does not feel responsible. These entrepreneurs have been in the employees' shoes as well.

On the other hand, there was also one participant who experiences his change according to responsibility the other way around. He perceives himself as feeling less responsible as an entrepreneur than as a professional. Participant A:

*“It might sound weird, but when I worked for an employer I felt so much responsibility. I always wanted to do everything as best as I could. I wanted to prove to my manager and employer that everything went well. When something did not go as planned, I went home with a lot of stress, because I was scared of what my manager and employer would say the next day. Since I am an entrepreneur I still have a big responsibility towards my own company, my employees and my clients, but I feel so calm now. The reason is that I have everything in my own hands now. There is not someone above me that tells me how I must do something and that gives me peace.”*

#### **4.1.8 Social**

Taking a closer look at the eighth change about being social, most participants see themselves as social persons. When they worked as a professional, the participants were able to fulfill that social aspect because of their interaction with other colleagues. However, some participants experienced difficulties with fulfilling the social aspect during their professional career. The following is said by Participant B:

*“The advantage of working in a shop during my professional career was that I worked in a team with nice colleagues. I am someone who likes to be with other people, to be in contact with others, so that is something I enjoyed during my professional job. Since the start of my own business, it takes more effort to fulfill that social aspect.”*

Furthermore, Participant J said:

*“From one day to the following day I made the transition from being employed to being an entrepreneur. Because I am a freelancer I do not have employees and thus no direct contact with colleagues. Missing that social aspect is something I have definitely misjudged. I did not know that contact with other colleagues was so important for me. At*



*some point I even felt lonely. Therefore I started looking on the internet to find fellow freelancers who work in the same industry as I do. Nowadays, I still spend a lot of time with them to fulfill the social aspect I need in my daily life.”*

Moreover, Participant M said:

*“The most negative change I am experiencing nowadays is that I am missing social contacts, because I work as a freelancer now. I have discovered that having other people around me is important to me.”*

It is shown that entrepreneurs who perceive themselves as social beings, might need to fulfill this social aspect during their entrepreneurial career as well. Especially for entrepreneurs who work as freelancers it might be more difficult to fulfill this social aspect. Therefore, these entrepreneurs might need to find solutions on how to solve this by for example finding equivalents.

#### **4.1.9 Freedom**

Taking a deeper look to the ninth change about freedom, the next has been said by Participant I:

*“I always took for granted that I needed to work from Monday till Friday from 8:00 AM till 18:00 PM. The weekends were to rest and to do some nice activities. When I became an entrepreneur I discovered that I could plan my own work days and that I could attend activities that I was not able to attend when I worked for an employer. I had for example all the time for my children. I could see them grow up and I never had to send them to daycare at school. By then, I started to realize that there is more in life than work. Work is important of course, but it is not everything. When I worked for an employer, work was way more important for me, but why? I do not know to be honest. I think it has to do with the fact that you need a salary, you need money in order to maintain your family. I look at that differently now.”*

Participant J said the following:

*“The freedom that I have now has changed myself as a person. As an employee I did not know that freedom could give me so much happiness. Since I can plan my own working*

*days and since I started my own business where I am passionate about, I may go to work instead of I must go to work. I felt it was a must when I worked for an employer.”*

As is shown in the previous quotations, entrepreneurs might experience a change in their freedom when they become an entrepreneur and their view on life might change because of this. Some examples are that entrepreneurs can classify their own time and that they can earn more money. Because of this change, the entrepreneurs might be able to enjoy things in life that they otherwise not always were able to experience during their professional career. It can be said that entrepreneurs might see themselves as executors when they are a professional, since they are doing what is asked from them and because of the fact that they might feel obligated towards carrying out their professional job. Entrepreneurs might see themselves as influencers when they are an entrepreneur, because they have the feeling that they are more in charge of making their own choices.

#### **4.1.10 Self-focus**

Looking at the tenth change about self-focus, Participant A said:

*“When I started my own company, there were many people that wanted to give me advice on how to manage certain things. In the beginning, I followed up their advice and listened to them. However, I explored that I was not myself and that I made choices I did not fully agree with. At a certain point I mentioned that I wanted to focus on myself and that I wanted to make my own decisions. I even said goodbye to some people that did not accept this. Since I have been focusing more on myself and my own gut feeling, I perform way better.”*

Participant G said:

*“Now I am doing everything that feels best for myself and for my clients, not for my boss anymore.”*

Participant K said:

*“For too long I have done things in life that I did not want to do. I was often chasing the dreams of my parents. They always wanted me to do a study that had good job opportunities and they wanted me to have a job that gives me security. I felt unlucky by doing this. I did*

*not like my study and I did not like any of my professional jobs. At one point, I started to focus more on myself. I did not care anymore about my parents' opinions and started to follow my own dreams. My parents are still sceptical about my own business, even when I show my successes, but I am accepting this situation now."*

Seeing the previous three quotations as an example, it is shown that some entrepreneurs experienced a shift from focusing on others to focusing on themselves. Entrepreneurs could be seen as followers when they listen to what other people think and what other people think the entrepreneur should do. Entrepreneurs could be seen as determined when they start to focus on themselves and are daring to make their own decisions. Thus, a change an entrepreneur might experience is from being a follower towards being more determined.

#### **4.1.11 Mindset**

Regarding the eleventh change about mindset, the following is said by Participant F:

*"When I started my own business I got in touch with mindset, because people from the same industry were working on their mindset as well. I was curious about what was going on in my head. I always thought a lot about my thoughts, but not so much as you do when you are working on your mindset. I have been questioning what I thought on a daily basis about myself and how much I did want to achieve my goals. Are the opinions of other people that important? At the moment, I am working on my mindset every morning. It has become a part of my routine during my entrepreneurial career. I also notice when I am not working on my mindset for a couple of days that I start to have more negative thoughts and to overthink."*

Furthermore, Participant K said:

*"When I was an employee I had a very bad mindset. I had such a negative self-image. I always thought that I was doing a great job, but at the same time I said so many negative things to myself every day, like can I do that? Will I be able to accomplish that? If you pronounce that to yourself, then you are creating it as well. When I started working on my mindset I discovered my negative thoughts and started to work on these. Nowadays I am a*

*person that is full of positivity and I only keep positive people in my life. I close myself off to negative people.”*

On top of that, Participant O said:

*“When you become an entrepreneur you also come in contact with some challenges that you did not have as a professional. You have to be strong sometimes. To be honest, I was very insecure during my professional career. I was always scared that I would not satisfy my boss. When I started my own business I started to become scared that I would not satisfy the people around me. I knew that I had to do something about my thoughts and feelings. Therefore I started working on my mindset.”*

These three quotations show that entrepreneurs might switch from being negative towards being a more positive person when they start being more mindful of how they think, how they behave, and how they deal with outside influences. It is shown that working on their mindset has become an important part of their entrepreneurial career.

#### **4.1.12 Comfort zone**

Considering the twelfth change about getting out of the comfort zone, Participant B said:

*“I am convinced that every new thing that you do is scary. I especially faced that when I started my own business. I was responsible for many tasks and I had to tell the people around me about my new business. When problems and struggles arose, I had to fix that all by myself which was scary and felt uncomfortable. I also saw that when I stepped out of my comfort zone that I developed myself more. Nowadays, I am always trying to see where I can improve myself by stepping out of my comfort zone. During my professional career I always chose a safe, comfortable spot. I did not challenge myself.”*

Participant M said:

*“As you know I am working with social media for my own business. To bring my own business to the next level I had to go out of my comfort zone by making videos about myself and I also needed to give live training sessions. If you had asked me two years ago if I would do these things, I would have said: never.”*

These two quotations illustrate that entrepreneurs might see their previous professional self as cautious, protective and retracted persons when they are not daring to get out of their comfort zones. Thereafter, when making the transition from professional to entrepreneur, the entrepreneurs might see themselves as challenging and persistent persons when they are more daring to get out of their comfort zones. They also may start to see getting out of their comfort zones as a means for personal development and growth.

#### **4.1.13 View on society**

Looking at the thirteenth change about the view on society, Participant A said the following:

*“At this point in life I want to give something back to society, especially in the form of improving the environment. I am in the fortunate position that I can do this now.”*

Besides that, Participant E said:

*“I notice that I am changing now. I am not economically driven anymore. I want to give back to society and that may sound weak and boring, but I feel it that way. With my company we are setting up a plan to contribute to a circular economy. Furthermore, I give more and more to charities. I like that, you know. I see that I am moving more and more towards that direction. Can I help other people? The food bank for example? That becomes more important to me. If I end up in the position that I can not work further as an entrepreneur, I would like to become a volunteer. I am an animal lover. Or I am going to invest in animal ambulances.”*

On top of that, Participant N said:

*“During my professional career I earned a stable salary each month. Every month I was looking at how many costs I had and how much money I could spend for myself. That was not always much, so I mainly used that for myself and my family. When I started my business, I had to pay even more attention to money, because I did not have a stable income each month. When my business started to be more successful, I got the opportunity to look*

*further than only spending money for myself and my family. I always like to help local charities that provide assistance to less fortunate people for example.”*

It is seen that entrepreneurs regarding their money might consider themselves as self-oriented, self-sufficient persons during the professional and the liminal phase. Entrepreneurs might see themselves as becoming more self-oriented and materialistic when their businesses start to be successful. However, at a certain point, entrepreneurs might have the feeling that their needs can no longer be fulfilled with only using their earned money for themselves, but that they want to give back to society in the form of sponsoring, charity donating, volunteering and helping with environmental problems. Therefore it can be said that entrepreneurs might change to becoming more society-oriented, generous and helpful.

#### **4.1.14 Goals**

The last change that has been described is about the entrepreneurs' personal goals. Participant F said:

*“I want to travel so badly. I want to explore the world and get to know other cultures. My travel journey does not mean that I am going for a specific time period, but that I can stay as long as I would like to. Because I am working online a lot, I can take my business easily with me. By traveling on my own and exploring the world, I believe that I can improve my personal development which will hopefully also improve the development of my business. For me, doing a world trip means having time and financial freedom.”*

She also said:

*“I would like to expand my revenue sources. I am planning to start with cryptocurrencies in the near future. Later, I might want to grow into the real estate industry as well.”*

This was said according to Participant J:

*“I have seen in my environment that having only one revenue stream is risky. You are too dependent on just one revenue stream, so it is always better to broaden that. At the moment, I am in the rental industry, real estate industry and recruitment industry. I am learning*

*more now about cryptocurrencies and I would like to start with that soon. I think cryptocurrencies are the future.”*

The following is said by Participant M:

*“I hope that I can travel more in the near future. My biggest dream is to move to Spain and take my business with me.” She also said: “I am always searching for new things to develop myself and my business. I would like to have my revenue sources. Real estate is something I am interested in, so when the time is right, I will definitely dive into that industry as well.”*

It shows that entrepreneurs would like to travel to explore the world and other cultures. Furthermore, they would like to expand their revenue streams by investing in cryptocurrencies and real estate for example. Moreover, as explained earlier, some entrepreneurs would like to give back to society. This shows that entrepreneurs would like to become more exploratory, resourceful, inventive, curious, bustling and good-hearted.

#### **4.2 Identity Conflicts**

In the Identity Conflicts section, the results from the identity changes according to the category Entrepreneurs’ Personal Struggles will be described.

**Table 2 - Main findings of Identity Conflicts**

	<b>Professional Identity</b>	<b>Liminal Entrepreneurial Identity</b>	<b>Entrepreneurial Identity</b>
1.	<p>Misfit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants felt a misfit between their professional identity and personal identity.</li> <li>- This could for example be that they preferred</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When starting their own businesses, most participants felt that they were more able to merge their personal identity with their new entrepreneurial identity. As an</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants state that their entrepreneurial identity fits better with their personal identity than their professional identity did.</li> <li>- However, most</li> </ul>

	<p>using other approaches than their managers or employers preferred. Another example is that some participants missed having stable work hours, because they prefer routine. Moreover, the organizational culture did not always fit with the ideal organizational culture characteristics of the participants.</p>	<p>example, if the entrepreneur preferred stable working hours without having night shifts, because he or she loves routine, he or she was able to create that.</p>	<p>participants do not consider themselves as having a complete connection with their new entrepreneurial identity, because there are always things they are responsible for that do not fit with their personal identity.</p>
2.	<p>Fights and arguments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants mentioned that they ended up having heavy arguments and fights with their colleagues, managers and employers during their professional career, because they could not agree on each other.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants started to feel more calm and relaxed, because they were either working as freelancers or they started to hire employees with whom they got along well. As a consequence, the participants experience less arguments and fights than during their professional jobs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants still have arguments sometimes with their employees, but they call that sound and healthy arguments which are perceived as normal in a business.</li> </ul>
3.	<p>Creativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants who perceived themselves as creative persons, felt that they were</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The participants felt that they were able again to express their own creativity and think outside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The participants who felt that they were creative persons, have the feeling that they can</li> </ul>



	<p>blocked in their creativity during their professional career.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sometimes they felt that they got the chance from their employers to be creative, but they still had to think within certain boxes.</li> </ul>	<p>boxes.</p>	<p>now express their creativity when they want in their own organization.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- However, this can still be blocked sometimes, because of fixed procedures that need to be followed or because the clients have specific wishes.</li> </ul>
4.	<p>Doubtful social surrounding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In retrospect, the participants did not experience doubtful social surroundings when they had their professional job.</li> <li>- The participants think that this is because a professional job brings more certainty, a more stable salary and less risk than an entrepreneurial job.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When participants made the transition from professional to becoming an entrepreneur, some of them experienced that their social surroundings were doubtful about them starting their own businesses.</li> <li>- Reasons for this were that their social surroundings thought that having an entrepreneurial job will bring more uncertainty and more risks.</li> <li>- Therefore, these participants felt that they missed the support that they were expecting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants still face that their social surroundings are doubtful about their businesses, but the participants have accepted this.</li> <li>- Some participants feel that they have proved their social surroundings wrong about their doubts, because of the successes the participants have booked with their own businesses.</li> </ul>
5.	<p>Work-life balance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants felt that they had a better work-life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The participants described the in-between phase as a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants still face struggles with their work-life</li> </ul>

	<p>balance as a professional, because after a working day with fixed working hours, they were truly free and could do whatever they wanted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants felt that they had a worse work-life balance as a professional, because they had for example to work over time a lot and now they are able to decide that for themselves.</li> </ul>	<p>period where they had to find their rhythm and balance between work and life. For some participants this was easier than for others.</p>	<p>balance now they are an entrepreneur. They have the feeling that their work is never finished and they are able to work till late at night and during the weekends. Therefore it is sometimes difficult to separate their work and private life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- However, some participants perceive their work-life balance as being better than during their professional career.</li> </ul>
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#### **4.2.1 Misfit**

According to the first struggle about misfit, Participant G mentioned the following:

*“During my professional career I was a manager of a specific department. I always call myself a coaching manager. I always use a human-oriented approach when I lead a team. I believe that when employees feel good, feel heard and feel safe, that they perform the best. However, my boss always took a result-oriented approach. He did not care if there were deaths so to speak, as long as the results were good. I am someone who thinks it is important that everyone is in their right place and then the results will come naturally. It does not always have to be perfect. That clashed incredibly with my boss. Now I am an entrepreneur, there are still tasks where I am responsible for that do not fit me, for example doing the administrative tasks, but it needs to be done when you are your own boss.”*

The following was said by Participant I:

*“With my professional role I never had fixed working hours. Every day was different and I had to work night shifts as well. I am a person who finds rhythm very important, but that*

*was not possible with my professional job. I noticed that I was getting tired more and more and that I was also facing physical discomforts. Now as an entrepreneur, I am able to create my own routine and stable working hours.”*

Participant J stated:

*“During the first years of my professional job I had the task to support my manager, but my manager did not listen to me, so I did not feel heard. He always had the idea that he was right, because he worked there already for twenty years. I did not feel like I was adding value. Later, when I got a management position, I did not enjoy leading a department. I always had the feeling that I worked the hardest and every day I had new struggles with my employees.”*

Participant K mentioned:

*“I had professional jobs where hierarchy was a thing and if I do not like something, it is hierarchy. I tried to find new jobs where there was less hierarchy, but when I ended up there, there was always a culture where people with higher positions felt better than others. It was said that you were free in your choice of clothing, but if you were not dressed in a suit, all eyes were on you. I am someone who likes to wear what I want. One day I prefer a casual look, but the other day I would like to wear something more comfortable. That is who I am.”*

According to Participant L:

*“During my professional career I had a job position that was too easy for me. My managers promised me that I would get a higher position that would fit my education level, but they did not live up to that. I was not challenged anymore.”*

Regarding the first struggle about a misfit with the entrepreneurs’ personal identity and professional and entrepreneurial identity, it is shown that most entrepreneurs felt a greater misfit between their personal identity and professional identity than between their personal identity and entrepreneurial identity. For example, Participant G told that her human-oriented approach did not fit with the result-oriented approach that her employer took. Therefore, it looks like Participant G

and her employer faced a conflict of interest. She still has to do things that she does not like, such as administrative tasks, but it seems like she accepts this, because you have these obligations as an entrepreneur. Participant I stated that she sees herself as a person that functions best when she has routine and rhythm in her life. Because she had to work night shifts during her professional job, she struggled with not having routine and rhythm. As an entrepreneur, she has stable working hours and days. It seems like she sees herself as changed from being tired, fatigued and having physical pain towards feeling as a healthier person. Considering Participant K, it appears that she faced difficulties with matching her personal identity to the organizational culture of her professional job. She had the feeling that she could not be who she wanted to be. Looking at the example of Participant L, it seems that he is someone that needs to be challenged during his job. He has struggled with his professional job, because he was not challenged there. Looking at the previous stories, it appears that the greater the misfit, the more likely the entrepreneurs are prone to feeling unchallenged, stressed and not understood.

#### **4.2.2 Fights and arguments**

Regarding the second struggle about fights and arguments, Participant G said:

*“It was so grim. It was not funny anymore. My boss said that we are a disaster together. When I got my next professional job as a manager, everything exploded. I did not get support from my boss and I was constantly in a fight with my employees. The employees were stubborn and were convinced that they were always right. Now I am my own boss without employees, I do not have these arguments and fights anymore. Therefore, I am going to work more calmly and relaxed now. I do not have to be scared that there will be another working day with arguments and fights.”*

Moreover, Participant J said:

*“I clashed so hard with my manager that it was no longer a workable situation for me there.”*

Furthermore, Participant L mentioned:

*“There was a new manager in the organization where I worked and he was not empathic, while I am empathic. During our first meeting, it already got stuck between us. He was convinced that he was right with everything and I had nothing to say.”*

Besides that, according to Participant O:

*“Of course, you still have arguments with your employees during your entrepreneurial career, but that is normal in an organization. What is not normal in an organization, is that you are fighting with others or having arguments with lots of cursing. That does not happen here, because I think it is important to treat each other with respect.”*

So, considering the struggle about fights and arguments, it is shown that some entrepreneurs consider themselves as working in a healthier working environment now than they experienced during their professional career. For example, Participant G showed that she felt scared, because she was afraid to go to work, because there were many arguments and fights at her workplace. Because she does not face severe arguments anymore at her entrepreneurial job, she feels more calm and relaxed. Participant J described the situation at his professional job as bad that he made the decision to leave. Regarding their identity, it can be argued that these entrepreneurs have changed in feeling scared to go to work, feeling irritated, feeling not understood to being more amiable, respectful and calm persons during arguments.

### **4.2.3 Creativity**

Regarding the third struggle about creativity, Participant D stated:

*“During my professional job, I had to do my job according to certain approaches while I had other ideas about how we could do things better.”*

Participant E said:

*“I can use my creativity more during my entrepreneurial career than during my professional career, but what I said earlier, I also have to adhere to the wishes of the customers and the fixed procedures that we need to follow within the organization, so I can*

*not always use my creativity. Sometimes that can be a struggle, because you have other ideas of how to do certain things.”*

According to Participant J:

*“At work, you are often told that you are allowed to use your own creativity and that you can come up with new ideas. However, in reality it appears that you still have to think within boxes.”*

Moreover, Participant K mentioned:

*“My bosses always said that I was allowed to be free and to be creative, but they still limit you. You have to keep thinking within boxes. So it turned out that I was limited in my creativity, while in fact I am a very creative person. I could not express my creativity there. Because I am my own boss now, I can use my own creativity all the time and I also support that towards my employees.”*

Considering the third struggle about creativity, it is shown that some entrepreneurs have the feeling that they were not able to express their creativity during their professional career, because they had to still think within boxes. This can be seen in the quotations of Participants J and K. The entrepreneurs who experienced this could be seen as being limited and bounded. The entrepreneurs have the feeling that they are to a certain extent more able to express their own creativity during their entrepreneurial career. It can be said that they see themselves as more creative and inventive as an entrepreneur than as a professional. However, Participant E stated that he is able to use his creativity more during his entrepreneurial career than his professional career, but that he is still a bit limited in using his creativity, because he depends on the wishes of his customers.

#### **4.2.4 Doubtful social surrounding**

The fourth struggle about a doubtful social surrounding was discussed by several participants. Participant B said the following:

*“I had a lot of people in my environment who were sceptical about my business. That is not something you want to hear. They were constantly asking whether it is wise to start my own business. I did not get support from them.”*

Furthermore, Participant K mentioned:

*“My parents are very traditional so they still think it is better to have a professional job that gives you certainty. I have accepted that I can not change their thoughts, even if I prove them wrong by showing my successes. However, the other persons within my environment who were doubtful at first about my own business, are enthusiastic now, because they see how I have grown.”*

Participant M said:

*“My environment reacted differently on the news that I was going to start my own business. Especially my parents were sceptical. They thought that it would be better to go for certainty. That was difficult for me in the beginning. I also often apologized to my environment when I did not have success and I have thought many times to stop with my own business. At the moment I do not care anymore what other people think about me. This is something that I like to do and if my environment does not like that, it says more about them than about me.”*

Regarding the fourth struggle about a doubtful social surrounding, it is shown that some entrepreneurs experience that their social surroundings are doubtful about them making the transition from a professional towards an entrepreneur. The entrepreneurs might have the feeling that they are not getting the support that they expect from their social surroundings. To overcome this, the entrepreneurs might choose to accept this or to prove their social surroundings wrong. For example, as seen by Participant M, who thought several times about stopping with her business, but still has continued with her business, show that while the entrepreneurs first might feel reluctant to start their own businesses, the entrepreneurs' persistence can help to overcome the difficulties they face with their doubtful social surroundings.

#### **4.2.5 Work-life balance**

Lastly, the fifth struggle that was discussed is about having a work-life balance. The following quotation comes from Participant B:

*“It is so easy to pick up my phone and my laptop and to work further on my business. Finding this balance is something that is still difficult for me. The work is never finished.”*

Additionally, Participant I said:

*“Although I have stable working hours and days, I still struggle with the fact that people can contact our business for 24 hours a day, because you always feel responsible when something happens outside normal working hours. That was not the case during my professional job.”*

Participant J mentioned:

*“During my professional career, I finished sometimes at 15:00 PM, but I was not allowed to leave the office, because I officially had to work till 17:00 PM. I can now decide for myself when I work and can therefore also coordinate this with my private life.”*

Besides that, Participant K said:

*“I worked a lot over time for my professional job. I never had the feeling that I was finished and I wanted to please my boss. I worked further at home during the nights and during the weekends, seven days a week. Since I have my own business I do not have to report to anyone and therefore I have a better work life balance now. I now feel when I have to take rest and I can actually take my rest now.”*

The struggle about having a work-life balance shows that some entrepreneurs struggle with finding the right work-life balance while others have less difficulties with this. Some entrepreneurs have the feeling that they always can work and that there never comes an end to their work. It can be described that these entrepreneurs see themselves as more restless when it comes to their work as an entrepreneur. In contrast, other entrepreneurs see themselves as being more self-aware about when they allow themselves to stop with their work and enjoy their private lives.



### 4.3 Emotional Identity

In the Emotional Identity section, the results from the identity changes according to the category Entrepreneurs' Personal Feelings will be described. The features that are going to be described are about their emotions, their life satisfaction, their work satisfaction and their level of happiness.

**Table 3 - Main findings of Emotional Identity**

	<b>Professional Identity</b>	<b>Liminal Entrepreneurial Identity</b>	<b>Entrepreneurial Identity</b>
1.	<p>Life and work satisfaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants were less satisfied with their professional jobs than with their entrepreneurial jobs.</li> <li>- This had to do with several reasons, such as feeling bored at work, feeling not challenged at work and having little responsibility and control.</li> <li>- In retrospect, the participants saw themselves as less luckier and happier as a professional than as an entrepreneur.</li> <li>- One participant is not sure if she is more satisfied with her entrepreneurial career than with her professional career. She feels happy and lucky in her</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants state that when they just started their own businesses, that their environment was complimenting them about how much luckier and happier the participant looked.</li> <li>- Most participants started to realize the advantages of an entrepreneurial job they were not able to experience during their professional job. For example, setting their own goals and realizing them, the feeling that they can go to work instead of they must go to work and making something that they like to do in life as their job.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants are more satisfied with their entrepreneurial jobs than with their professional jobs.</li> <li>- This has to do with having more responsibilities and control, the ability to challenge themselves more and working in a field that they like.</li> <li>- As a consequence, the participants feel luckier as an entrepreneur than as a professional.</li> <li>- This has resulted in the fact that participants perceive themselves as having a higher life satisfaction.</li> <li>- One participant is not sure if she is more satisfied with her entrepreneurial career than with her professional career. She feels happy and</li> </ul>

	life, but she is not sure if that is because of her entrepreneurial career.		lucky in her life, but she is not sure if that is because of her entrepreneurial career.
2.	<p>Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants saw themselves as having difficulties with controlling their private emotions in business-related situations.</li> <li>- Therefore, some participants chose to avoid confrontations at their professional job.</li> <li>- These participants describe themselves as being less professional in their behaviour and emotions as a professional than as an entrepreneur.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants realized that they had to become more professional in their emotions and behaviour, because they are the face of their business. Making a mistake because of expressing for example private emotions can have consequences for their business.</li> <li>- Participants started to learn how to be more professional in their behaviour and emotions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants see themselves as being more professional in their behaviour and emotions as an entrepreneur than as a professional. Most participants perceive themselves as having more control over their emotions. They can better separate their private and business-related emotions.</li> </ul>

**4.3.1 Life and work satisfaction**

The first change about life and work satisfaction have been described by several participants during the interviews. Participant A mentioned the following:

*“I need many responsibilities in my life and I need to do a lot, otherwise I get bored. My own company helps me to fulfill these aspects which my previous professional job was not able to. My entrepreneurial career fits me way better than my professional career. I think that is the reason why I am so much happier now.”*

Moreover, Participant C said:

*“The whole day, I am doing what I want and that is also something that I like. That gives me a satisfied feeling.”*

Furthermore, Participant D stated:

*“I started my own business in a time of crisis. Everyone around me was saying things like, this is a discarded year, my whole life is at a standstill. It gives me a satisfied feeling that I have done so much last year to start my own business. It just pleases me a lot to be an entrepreneur.”*

In addition, Participant F said:

*“Having my own business has made me realize that I can set my own goals and my own purposes. I know what I want in life now and during my professional career it seemed like a dream and now I see it becoming a reality. That motivates me so much and makes me lucky.”*

On top of that, Participant G mentioned:

*“I have got the most amazing job in the world now. I may go to work instead of I must go to work. That is a liberation when you can think like that. Or better said, can feel like that. I am doing only things that I like now. That just makes me feel very happy.”*

Besides that, Participant H said:

*“I feel good in my skin every day and that is not something that I could have said before. During my professional career I got into a rut. The fun of my job went away.”*

Additionally, Participant I said:

*“I am feeling happy and lucky. I already explained that I enjoyed the fact that I could see my kids grow up because I am an entrepreneur. However, I do not know if I would have made this choice again. I am still missing my professional job, because that position fits me better.”*

Furthermore, Participant K stated:

*“I felt so unlucky during my professional job. I was not challenged and every day I had to be dragged out of my bed. At one point I hoped that they would fire me. I already got better from a burnout and I was so scared to get one again. Since I started my own business I have never felt so lucky.”*

Moreover, Participant L stated:

*“I certainly feel happier since I am an entrepreneur. I can point that out with an example of what my wife told me at some point. In the starting phase of my own business, I was still working as a professional for another company. My wife said to me that I looked commercially and businesslike enthusiastic when I talked about my professional job. However, when I talked about my own business, I looked childlike enthusiastic. Well, this example indicates that I am feeling happier with my entrepreneurial career.”*

As a last example, Participant M said:

*“My daughter is only thirteen years old and she even says that I am looking much happier since I started my own business.”*

It can be seen that most entrepreneurs consider themselves as having a higher life and work satisfaction as an entrepreneur in comparison to being a professional. It is not only that they discover that by themselves, but also because of reactions from their environment as is described by Participants L and M. The quotations show that entrepreneurs notice that they feel luckier and happier because of different reasons. Participant A has the idea that he feels happier, because his entrepreneurial job gives him the opportunity to be busy and he likes to do a lot in his life. Participant C feels luckier, because he has the idea that his entrepreneurial tasks are tasks that he likes as a person. Participant D explained that he is luckier, because he feels what he is doing for his entrepreneurial job is useful. Participant F feels luckier, because her entrepreneurial job gives her more motivation to reach her goals and gives her the opportunity to realize her dreams. After all these examples, it is shown that most entrepreneurs feel happier and luckier at their entrepreneurial job and in their private lives. It can be said that these entrepreneurs moved from little bored and somber well-beings to cheerful, joyful and content well-beings. Participant I was

the only participant who does not know if she feels happy and lucky because of her entrepreneurial career, because she also misses her professional career.

#### **4.3.2 Emotions**

Looking at the second change about emotions, the following is stated by Participant D:

*“Since I am working on my own, I have become more professional in my behaviour, emotions and communication skills. The reason why this has changed is because I am responsible to show the best version of myself towards my clients. It is quite funny, because sometimes I work together with my colleagues from my previous professional job and they have an informal way of communication with their clients. It is weird to see that this is something that has changed me.”*

Moreover, Participant F said:

*“I have always been quite calm, but I often avoided confrontations because of my emotions. Now I dare to stand up for myself and to confront people in a mature way.”*

Furthermore, Participant I stated:

*“Earlier, I used to respond quite bluntly, because of my deeper emotions. Now I have learned that it is sometimes better to count till ten and to respond as professionally as possible. I think that is a must for an entrepreneur.”*

Last, Participant M said:

*“When I was a professional I often reacted from my emotions and in some situations you need to hide your own emotions. Since I am an entrepreneur I have learnt to deal with that. I have become more professional now, because now I am able to dwell on the situation and try to discover what I actually feel. I take more time to come up with a more professional response and more professional actions.”*

One could say that entrepreneurs might change in their emotions after becoming an entrepreneur. The entrepreneurs feel that they need to be more professional in their behaviour and emotions as an entrepreneur than they needed in their professional career, because they are now self-

responsible for their own businesses. It can be said that the entrepreneurs could change from being either a blabbermouth or reticent towards more thoughtful and calm persons with a more mature attitude.

## 5. DISCUSSION

In this thesis, research has been done about the change in professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities of entrepreneurs who have worked for an employer before. The research question that was developed sounds as follows: *“How do entrepreneurs construct the difference between their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self after becoming an entrepreneur?”* An answer to this research question can be given by the three categories that are described in the results section: Role Identity, Identity Conflicts and Emotional Identity.

Looking at the results of these different categories, one can see that there is not a straightforward answer to the research question. It is rather a way of perspective and what the participants have experienced in their professional phase, the liminal phase and their entrepreneurial phase. However, the results show that all fifteen participants that have participated in this research, experience changes in their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self. Moreover, this research serves as an addition to academic knowledge in multiple ways.

Firstly, the participants described the changes in their professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities by explaining their role identity. As told earlier, the role identity means how a person describes his- or herself and how he or she wants to be as a person. In the theoretical framework it is shown that research about a person's role identity has been done in different settings, also in professional identity and entrepreneurial identity research. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) for example, have investigated how people revise, reconstruct and change their identities in professional work role transitions. However, the research of Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) only looked at work role transitions of employees working for an employer, while this research has investigated the change in role identity of professionals who have become entrepreneurs. Moreover, Hoang and Gimeno (2010) suggested at the end of their paper that more research should be done on role identity changes in role transitions and mentioned

particularly that this could be done for previous professionals who are entrepreneurs now. Looking at the literature review and suggestions for future research by Wagenschwanz (2021), it is seen that there is still a lack of research about identity changes due to role transitions. Thus, it can be said that this research has built further on has contributed to existing studies by explaining the identity change of entrepreneurs by looking at their professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities. Instead of looking at one identity, this research has used a combination of three different identities to explain changes between these three identities.

As an addition, because of taking a qualitative approach and using narratives, this research has resulted in giving concrete insights, explanations and examples by showing real-life quotations and stories about changes in entrepreneurs' previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self. Therefore, it can be said that this research has contributed to current narrative research about identities by for example (Down & Warren, 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Phillips et al., 2013 and Hoyer & Steyaert, 2015). Even though each participant has experienced his or her own unique change to becoming an entrepreneur, the results also illustrate that participants show similarities and opposites in their identity changes. On top of that, the outcomes of the results can be considered as an addition towards previous research. For example, Zhang and Chun (2018) have used narratives to investigate how immigrants in Canada who are entrepreneurs now, have revised, reconstructed their entrepreneurial identity and how they have changed. The study discusses several topics about identity change that the immigrant entrepreneurs have faced. It is striking that some topics are also discussed by entrepreneurs in this research, such as flexibility, freedom and passion. However, this research shows that there are also many other topics that entrepreneurs might talk about according to their identity changes, such as a change in their perceived leadership role, responsibility and self-confidence. This means that this research has contributed to previous studies by adding more important topics according to the identity change of a professional becoming an entrepreneur. Furthermore, it could be said that contextual factors might have an influence on the outcome of these kinds of studies. This will be further addressed in the limitations and suggestions for future research in the conclusion.

Furthermore, in the theoretical framework it is told that a role identity can change over time and that a role identity is not stable (Giddens, 1991; Baron, 2006 and Hoang & Gimeno, 2010). This

research confirms this, because although all entrepreneurs have to a certain extent created their own unique entrepreneurial identities, it is also shown that the entrepreneurs are still shaping their entrepreneurial identities. A reason for this is for example that entrepreneurs are trying to make their entrepreneurial identity closer towards their personal identity. It can be said that regarding this phenomenon, this research aligns with previous research about identities.

Secondly, the participants have described changes in their professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities by explaining identity conflicts. As stated before, identity conflicts are central for and can have an effect on identity changes. This research indicates that identity conflicts can indeed have an effect on the difference between entrepreneurs' previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self as is for instance said by Hirsh and Kania (2015). The identity conflicts that were discovered in this research were mainly about misfits between professional or entrepreneurial identities with self-identities. Since previous research by Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003) showed that misfits are central in identity conflicts, it can be stated that this research confirms this. However, what can be seen as a contribution is that there is more knowledge now about what these misfits are and why they arose. Plenty of examples have been given in the results section what kinds of misalignments with professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities or entrepreneurial identities with self-identities occurred and why they occurred. On top of that, in this research it is seen that identity conflicts not only arise because of misalignments between two or more identities, but also because of misjudgments of expectations.

Previous research showed that identity conflicts can have a negative, but also have a positive effect on the development of a professional or entrepreneurial identity (Lindebaum, Jordan and Dasborough, 2012). In this research, the negative effect shows that entrepreneurs can still struggle with shaping their entrepreneurial identities while they are already an entrepreneur for a longer period of time. The positive effect of identity conflicts is seen in the fact that entrepreneurs are also able to see identity conflicts as a possibility to learn from that and as a consequence can help to develop the entrepreneurs further. In other words, it seems like an addition to theory that entrepreneurs can use identity conflicts to reflect on situations, experiences, feelings and thoughts which enable entrepreneurs to come closer to their entrepreneurial identities.



Thirdly, the participants have described changes in their professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities by explaining their emotional identity. As told before, emotional identity is about the emotions, feelings and actions of a person that influence how that person describes him- or herself (Stets, 2005 and Winkler, 2018). This research shows that emotional identity has an influence on how entrepreneurs describe changes in their professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities. It is seen that entrepreneurs experience a higher life and work satisfaction as an entrepreneur than as a professional. Therefore, they feel happier and luckier than before. The entrepreneurs describe themselves as more cheer- and joyful well-beings than they were as a professional. Furthermore, it is shown that entrepreneurs perceive themselves as being more professional in handling their emotions which results in having a more mature attitude. From this it appears that this study can serve as an addition by showing that emotional identity can be used and translated to explain changes in professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this research, it is sought to answer the following research question: *“How do entrepreneurs construct the difference between their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self after becoming an entrepreneur?”* For this purpose, qualitative research was conducted by means of narratives that investigated the changes in professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities of fifteen Dutch entrepreneurs.

The results show that entrepreneurs construct the difference between their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self through their role identity, identity conflicts and their emotional identity. The way how entrepreneurs constructed changes about themselves by means of their role identity were about the perception of their leadership role, self-confidence, dependency, importances in life, passion, flexibility, responsibility, social, freedom, self-focus, mindset, comfort zone, view on society and goals. Furthermore, in the manner how entrepreneurs constructed changes in their professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities with the aid of identity conflicts were about the perception of their misfit, fights and arguments, creativity, doubtful social surrounding and work-life balance. Last, the way

how entrepreneurs constructed changes about themselves through their emotional identity were about the observation of their life and work satisfaction and emotions.

However, this research also contains some limitations that will be described now. First of all, the research sample consisted of interviewing fifteen participants. Taking the time period into consideration for writing this thesis, fifteen participants are acceptable. However, more participants could have given more additional results. Furthermore, the context of the research does also know some limitations. The entrepreneurs that were interviewed are both man and woman, they do have different ages, some work in different industries and there are differences for how long they are an entrepreneur. There is a possibility that these differences have an influence on the outcome of the results. For example, some participants are entrepreneurs for more than ten years, they work in complex, technological industries and have several employees under employment. Some other participants are entrepreneurs for less than two years and do not have employees under employment. It could be possible that different circumstances can lead to different result outcomes in their identity change. Other contextual factors that could have had an influence on the results are factors such as life experience and aging. It is quite complicated to state whether an identity change has occurred because of the role transition of becoming an entrepreneur or that factors such as life experience and aging also played a role in the identity change. Furthermore, the research could be distorted, because it is difficult to state that all participants have been fully honest during the interviews. There could be a possibility that the participant did not want to talk about a specific situation because of different reasons. The participants were talking about differences in their professional and entrepreneurial identity. The participant may tend to mention the positive changes and omit the less positive aspects.

Although the research knows some limitations, this research can still be perceived as a valuable addition towards current professional, liminal and identity research. Because of the use of qualitative research, the current theory can be broadened by looking at the narratives of the participants. The narratives have shown real-life quotations and stories on how the participants have constructed the difference in their previous professional self and current entrepreneurial self. For persons who are willing to become an entrepreneur, it could also be interesting to see how like-minded people construct and experience the difference between their previous professional

self and current entrepreneurial self, because it gives a better insight of what to expect when you make such a transition. Although this research has not focused on only professional identities, the results could still be of interest towards managers and employers, because it gives an overview of how entrepreneurs saw themselves as professionals which lead to managers and employers having a better understanding of what identity crises professionals might experience during their professional career.

Lastly, two concrete recommendations for future research will be given. The first suggestion for future research is to investigate to what extent the contextual factors, like industry, age and life experience are of influence on the change in an entrepreneur's professional and entrepreneurial identity. If these contextual factors have a significant influence on the results, future research about liminal entrepreneurial identities could be more specified by carrying out qualitative research for a specific entrepreneurial group. This can mean that the entrepreneurs within this group are working in the same industry for example.

A second suggestion for future research will be to carry out a quantitative research about a change in professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities. By doing this, the research sample can be broadened and more conclusions can be drawn about patterns, similarities, differences and contradictions.

## APPENDIX A

In this appendix, a table can be found with more information about the fifteen participants who were interviewed for this research about their change in professional identities, liminal entrepreneurial identities and entrepreneurial identities. Because of anonymity, no personal names and company names are mentioned.

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Professional Career in Chronological Order</b>	<b>Transition to Liminal Phase</b>	<b>Entrepreneurial Career</b>
<b>Participant A</b>	Man	55 years	Manager for different agencies and governmental organizations	In 2008	Engineering Consultancy Industry
<b>Participant B</b>	Woman	27 years	- Visual Merchandising in clothing stores - Vlogger at parties and festivals	In 2020 (still in liminal phase)*	Health & Lifestyle Industry
<b>Participant C</b>	Man	48 years	- Project leader of installation firm - Leader of mechanical engineering firm - Commercial manager of installation firm - Business manager	In 2010	Public Lighting Industry

			of installation firm - Branch manager of engineering firm		
<b>Participant D</b>	Man	24 years	Case Video Editor of production company	In 2020 (still in liminal phase)*	Digital Marketing Industry
<b>Participant E</b>	Man	57 years	- R&D engineer and project manager of interconnection solutions firm - Commercial director of electronics firm - Commercial manager and sales manager of electronics manufacturer	In 2009	Technological and Innovative Industry
<b>Participant F</b>	Woman	23 years	- Chairman of study association - Employee in supermarket - Employee in cleaning industry - Employee in clothing store - Internship in Curaçao	In 2019	Health & Lifestyle Industry

<b>Participant G</b>	Woman	53 years	- Road management consultant - Management consultant - Head of business development of an infrastructure consultancy company - Head of traffic and control engineering company	In 2012	Alternative Medicine Industry
<b>Participant H</b>	Man	23 years	- Sales employee in supermarket - Financial and accounting assistant	In 2020 (still in liminal phase)*	E-commerce Industry
<b>Participant I</b>	Woman	50 years	Nurse in a hospital	In 2000	Cleaning Industry
<b>Participant J</b>	Man	53 years	- Branch manager of a planning company - Senior consultant - Recruiter	In 2001	- Real Estate Industry - Consultancy Industry
<b>Participant K</b>	Woman	24 years	- Project manager of an advertising agency - Sales and recruitment consultant	In 2019	Health & Lifestyle Industry
<b>Participant L</b>	Man	49 years	- Management trainee and project leader of an energy network	In 2020 (still in liminal phase)*	- Public Lighting Industry - Consultancy

			<p>company</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Account manager and consultant of a public lighting company</li> <li>- Team manager commercial activities of a public lighting company</li> <li>- Product manager of an infra technology company</li> <li>- General manager of an infra technology company</li> <li>- Teacher in public lighting</li> <li>- Branch manager of a public lighting company</li> </ul>	phase)*	Industry
<b>Participant M</b>	Woman	31 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Airport security team leader</li> <li>- Civil affairs employee</li> <li>- Employee of a call center</li> <li>- Hospitality employee</li> </ul>	In 2019	Health & Lifestyle Industry
<b>Participant N</b>	Man	58 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Software engineer</li> </ul>	In 1999	Technological and

			for defense - Manager IT for defense - Software project manager of an aerospace company		Innovative Industry
<b>Participant O</b>	Woman	47 years	- Data analyst of an accounting organization - Data analyst of an insurance company	In 2007	Consultancy Industry

\* The participants B, D, H and L made the transition from being a professional towards an entrepreneur in 2020. They perceive themselves as still being in the liminal phase, because they are still searching what their actual entrepreneurial identity is. The other participants talked about the liminal phase retrospectively.



## APPENDIX B

In this appendix, the introduction can be found that has been utilized before the interview started. Besides that, the list with interview questions that were used sometimes, can be found. Because the interviews were in Dutch, the introduction and interview questions underneath are also in Dutch.

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Goedemorgen/goedemiddag meneer/mevrouw X,

Bij voorbaat dank dat u open staat voor deelneming aan dit onderzoek voor mijn master thesis van de studie Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Strategy aan de Universiteit van Twente. In mijn onderzoek kijk ik hoe entrepreneurs het verschil construeren in hun identiteit toen ze voor een werkgever werkten en nu ze entrepreneur zijn. Er wordt gekeken naar het verschil in de zogenoemde professional identity en de entrepreneurial identity. De professional identity slaat op de identiteit die een persoon aanneemt tijdens het werken voor een werkgever en entrepreneurial identity is de identiteit die een persoon aanneemt wanneer diegene entrepreneur is. Er is al eerder apart onderzoek gedaan naar professional identities en entrepreneurial identities, maar er is beperkt onderzoek gedaan naar deze begrippen samen. Voor dit gesprek heb ik een aantal vragen voorbereid, maar ik ga vooral kijken hoe het gesprek verloopt en welke richting er in wordt geslagen. Ik zal mij dus niet volledig vasthouden aan deze vragen, maar zal kijken welke onderwerpen in uw situatie belangrijk zijn geweest. Tijdens het gesprek mag u altijd vragen stellen en aangeven wanneer iets onduidelijk is of als u ergens niet over wil praten. Het is belangrijk om te vermelden dat het doel van dit onderzoek is om meer inzichten te verschaffen voor de wetenschap. Ik ga in gesprek met 15 verschillende entrepreneurs en deze gesprekken dienen als middel om deze inzichten te verschaffen. Het gaat niet om de individuele resultaten van de 15 entrepreneurs, maar om de resultaten in het geheel. Daarom zal uw anonimiteit altijd gewaarborgd worden. Er zijn geen juiste of onjuiste antwoorden, daarom zou ik u willen vragen om zo eerlijk en volledig mogelijk antwoord te geven. De antwoorden op de 'hoe', de 'wat' en de 'waarom' vragen zijn voor mijn onderzoek voornamelijk heel belangrijk. Daarnaast zou ik u willen vragen of u ermee akkoord gaat dat dit gesprek wordt opgenomen met mijn mobiele telefoon. Het gesprek kan zo achteraf volledig uitgewerkt worden en zal geanalyseerd worden in een daarvoor bestemd

programma: Atlas.ti. Dit programma helpt bij het verwerken van de verzamelde data om uiteindelijk tot resultaten en conclusies van het onderzoek te kunnen komen. De opname zal uiteraard verwijderd worden als ik mijn thesis met een voldoende heb verdedigd. De opname geldt namelijk ook als bewijs dat ik daadwerkelijk mijn onderzoek heb uitgevoerd.

Voor ik begin met het gesprek, wil ik u vragen of u nog vragen, onduidelijkheden of opmerkingen heeft over dit onderzoek en of u nog steeds bereid bent om deel te nemen. Als het allemaal duidelijk is en u akkoord heeft gegeven, begin ik nu met het gesprek.

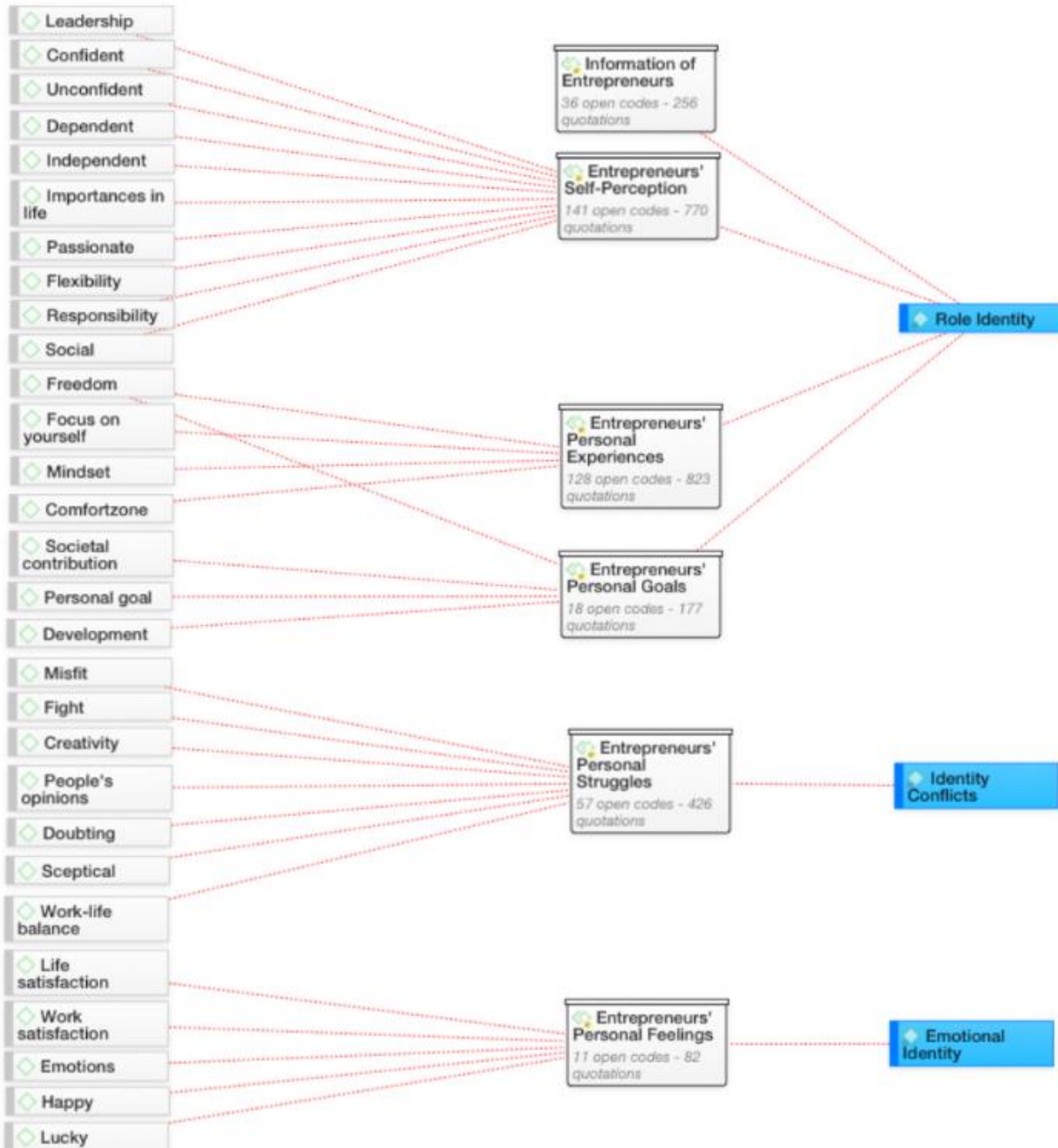
## **Vragen**

1. Zou u zichzelf willen introduceren? Wie bent u? Wat zijn uw hobby's en interesses?
2. Zou u iets kunnen vertellen over uw bedrijf en wanneer u hier bent begonnen?
3. Waar heeft u gewerkt voor u met dit bedrijf bent begonnen? Waarom heeft u voor deze baan/banen en dit/deze bedrijf/bedrijven gekozen?
4. Wat waren uw taken en verantwoordelijkheden tijdens deze baan/banen?
5. Paste dit toen bij u als persoon? Waarom wel/niet?
6. Heeft u er iets aan gedaan om dit meer passend te maken?
7. Zou u kunnen zeggen dat uw professional identity goed aansloot bij uw persoonlijke identiteit? Als het ergens niet helemaal aansloot, wat was daar dan het gevolg van? Had dat invloed op uw emoties?
8. U bent op een gegeven moment iets voor uzelf begonnen. Waarom heeft u ervoor gekozen om voor uzelf te beginnen?
9. In de wetenschap wordt gezegd dat wanneer een werknemer een sterke professionele identiteit heeft, dat degene makkelijker en beter weloverwogen keuzes kan maken. Zou u kunnen zeggen dat het hebben van een sterke professionele identiteit ervoor heeft gezorgd dat u de keuze kon maken om voor uzelf te beginnen?
10. In hoeverre heeft de rolverandering van werknemer naar entrepreneur effect gehad op uw levenstevredenheid?

11. Kunt u iets vertellen over de overgang van het werken voor een werkgever naar het worden van een entrepreneur? Kunt u iets vertellen over de eerste fase van het starten van uw eigen bedrijf?
12. Wat ging er goed en wat ging er minder goed? Waar kwam dit vandaan? Hoe heeft u dat opgelost?
13. Als u kijkt naar uzelf nu en voorheen toen u net startte als entrepreneur, in welke opzichten bent u veranderd? Waar komt dit vandaan? Ziet u dat als een positieve of een negatieve verandering?
14. Zou u een positieve en een negatieve verandering met betrekking tot uw identiteit kunnen noemen?
15. Heeft u er nu bepaalde eigenschappen bij gekregen die u voorheen niet had? Waar komt dit vandaan? Hoe zou dit zijn gekomen?
16. Is er een verandering opgetreden in hoe u vroeger omging met uw emoties en nu?
17. Gedraagt u zich anders in bepaalde situaties nu u een entrepreneur bent?
18. Heeft u het gevoel dat uw nieuwe rol als entrepreneur betekenisvoller is voor uzelf dan toen u werknemer was? Waarom wel/niet?
19. Zou u kunnen zeggen dat uw entrepreneurial identity goed aansluit bij uw persoonlijke identiteit? Als het ergens niet helemaal aansloot, wat was daar dan het gevolg van? Had dat invloed op uw emoties?
20. Hoe zou u zichzelf omschrijven als werknemer en hoe zou u zich omschrijven als entrepreneur?
21. Hoe zou u zich nog verder willen ontwikkelen als entrepreneur en waarom?

## APPENDIX C

In this appendix, the code diagram can be found that gives an overview of the analyzing process of the interviews.



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