

CONSTRUCTING THE INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY

A study of international entrepreneurship sense-making narratives

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ABSTRACT

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Title CONSTRUCTING THE INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY A study of international entrepreneurship sense-making narratives	
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<p>The aim of this master's thesis was to understand sense-making processes behind the paths of becoming an international entrepreneur and international entrepreneurial identity construction. The theoretical understanding of international entrepreneurship has remained rather incomplete and it seems that the research domain would benefit of a stronger emphasis placed on the perspective of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation. Additionally, more profound understanding of the process-like identity construction of international entrepreneurship of individuals, rather than organizations, is needed. Such gaps in the research domain served as the preliminary reasons for this thesis to be conducted.</p> <p>The theoretical groundings for this research was constructed based on a multidisciplinary framework combining theory and concepts from research literature on entrepreneurship and international business, social psychology, organizational behavior theories as well as narrative research. Key theories include the (narrative) identity construction, process of sense-making and international entrepreneurial orientation. Studying identity construction and sense-making processes of international entrepreneurs was justifiably done as a qualitative narrative research and the empirical data collected through in-depth narrative, non-directive, inquiry. Four international entrepreneurs were interviewed in order to seek deeper knowledge of what is international entrepreneurship, why and how does a former professional become an international entrepreneur and what kind of identities are constructed throughout the journey as they make sense of their experiences. Their narratives were interpreted based on the analysis of narratives and thematic analysis.</p> <p>The findings suggest that international entrepreneurs construct the international entrepreneurial identity by making sense of the experience and former knowledge, negotiated in an ongoing and evolving manner in interaction with the external world. Much of the reasoning of international entrepreneurship is primarily based on internal push and external pull factors which reflect entrepreneurial and international identity dimensions. Self-reflection as well as active and dynamic engagement with the surroundings reflect dimensions building up the frame for constructing the international entrepreneurial identity.</p> <p>The narratives reflected four types of international entrepreneurial identities: the Explorer, the Pioneer, the Native and the Seeker. The findings suggest that international entrepreneurship is not only about an entrepreneur strategically taking one's business into new markets and internationalization process, but it actually reflects a lengthier process forming the international entrepreneurial identity. The identity construction process takes "tours" into the social and individual aspects, emphasizing personal preferences of action. Meaningful in becoming an international entrepreneur are the actions and decisions one makes individually, which are then validated based on the environmental and circumstantial surroundings.</p>	
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<p>Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli lisätä ymmärrystä ja tietoa merkityksellistämisen prosesseista matkalla kansainväliseen yrittäjyyteen sekä kansainvälisen yrittäjyysidentiteetin muodostumisesta. Teoreettinen ymmärrys kansainvälisestä yrittäjyydestä on edelleen vajaata ja epätasapainossa kansainvälistymis- ja yrittäjyysteorioiden kesken. Tarve painottaa vahvemmin yrittäjyyttä, yrittäjyysorientaatiota sekä saada perustavanlaatuaista tietoa yksilön identiteettiprosesseista kansainvälisessä yrittäjyydessä olivat lähtökohtaisia syitä tälle tutkimukselle.</p> <p>Teoreettinen viitekehys muodostui monitieteellisestä käsitteistöstä ja teoriakentästä yrittäjyyden, kansainvälisen liiketalouden, sosiaalipsykologian, organisaatiokäyttäytymisen sekä narratiivisuuden tutkimuksesta. Avainteorioita ovat mm. (narratiivisen) identiteetin rakentuminen, kokemusten merkityksellistämisen prosessi sekä kansainvälinen yrittäjyysorientaatio. Tutkittavien ilmiöiden takia tutkimusmenetelmäksi valittiin laadullinen narratiivinen menetelmä. Empiirinen data kerättiin haastatteleamalla neljää kansainvälistä yrittäjää syväluotaavan narratiivisen, strukturoimattoman haastattelun keinoin. Analysoimalla ja tulkitsemalla yrittäjien narratiiveja, etsittiin ymmärrystä siihen, mitä on kansainvälinen yrittäjyys; miten ja miksi ammatinharjoittavasta tulee kansainvälinen yrittäjä; sekä minkälaisia identiteettejä muodostuu matkalla kansainväliseen yrittäjyyteen.</p> <p>Tuloksien mukaan kansainväliset yrittäjät muodostavat kansainvälisen yrittäjäidentiteetin merkityksellistämällä tapahtumia, kokemuksia ja aiempaa tietoa, ja se muovautuu jatkuvassa, kehittyvässä "neuvottelussa" ulkoisen maailman kanssa. Suurin osa kansainvälisen yrittäjyyden syistä on alun perin "sisäisen työntövoiman" ja "ulkoisen vetovoiman" aikaansaamia. Syyt heijastavat yrittäjyys- sekä kansainvälisyysidentiteetin dimensioita. Itse-reflektointi sekä aktiivinen ja dynaaminen vuorovaikutus ympäristön kanssa heijastavat kansainvälisen yrittäjyysidentiteetin muodostumisen kehystä.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen yrittäjyysnarratiivit muodostavat neljä eri kansainvälisen yrittäjyyden identiteettiä: Löytöretkeilijä, Pioneeri, Syntyperäinen ja Hakeutuja. Tuloksien valossa kansainvälinen yrittäjyys ei ole vain yrittäjän strategista päätöksentekoa tai yrityksen kansainvälistämistä uusille markkinoille, vaan se on pidempiaikainen kansainvälisen yrittäjäidentiteetin muodostava prosessi. Prosessissa identiteetti rakentuu pohdinnalle sosiaalisen ja yksilöllisten ulottuvuuksien välillä, korostaen yksilön tahtoa ja mieltymyksiä sekä aiempaa kokemusta. Kansainväliseksi yrittäjäksi tulemisessa merkittävää näyttää olevan on itsenäinen toiminta ja päätöksenteko, jotka arvioidaan suhteessa tilannekohtaiseen ympäristöön.</p>	
Asiasanat kansainvälinen yrittäjyys, kansainvälinen yrittäjäidentiteetti, narratiivinen identiteetti, kokemusten merkityksellistäminen, narratiivinen tutkimus	
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I admire all the international entrepreneurs out there. This master's thesis process got its initial inspiration from all those untold stories about the risk-taking of leaving the 'safe haven' of domestic markets and searching for global success in the form of international venturing. Such bravery seems to be taken for granted in so many ways, and I wish that these international "heroes" would start gaining the kind of attention that they deserve. I believe the international entrepreneurs are the sort of "game changers" in our contemporary business environments and I want to be enabling – even with this small gesture called a master's thesis – discussion that supports their invaluable efforts enhancing international business and cross-national prosperity.

I thank all of you four international entrepreneurs that I had the honor interviewing and listening, as you opened up your fascinating stories of becoming international entrepreneurs to me. The encounters made me feel privileged to be confide to about your personal and unique narratives of life experiences. Even the everyday and mundane parts of the narratives have never felt so special as they did when you told your life stories to me so openly. I was truly touched by your passion towards your entrepreneurial career and, most of all, your warmth and sincerity towards me.

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1 INTRODUCTION

There seems to be no specific theory of becoming an international entrepreneur. Just like we are all unique individuals and navigate through life with our own distinctly formed basis of knowledge and experiences, so does the processes of reasoning and sense-making of becoming an international entrepreneur differ one individual to another due to their unique life experiences.

That was my presumption - the starting point - for this study.

Narratives are a natural phenomenon and they exist everywhere in peoples' speech (McAdams 2013; Riessman 1993). Everyone narrates experience all of the time, thus, as a universal and natural course of action, it may time to time be overlooked as a form of knowledge in a scientific context (Bruner 1986). It is argued that many times individuals form difficult or complex life transitions and changes into narratives that have a plot, and a certain structure, making sense of the chain of events and actions. (Riessman 1993). Therefore, as a presumption, narratives also serve as a source of knowledge acquisition in relation to past experiences as a person is trying to navigate through life. Narratives as such are therefore highly contextual (Czarniawska 2004; Riessman 2008). Since narratives are usually easy to remember, knowledge can be constructed as a plot through building a bridge from former experience over to learning and further on into new knowledge in a way that sticks to the narrator as well as the possible listeners or readers.

It has been acknowledged that narrative is not just a research method, but it is also a mode of thought (Czarniawska 2004; McLean & Thorne 2003) by which the narrators make sense of events and incidents of their lives. Moreover, in some cases narratives may even help people to recover and gain better mental health when they make sense of past experiences (Pennebaker & Seagal 1999). In the light of narrative research, it has been recognized that individuals and groups use narratives to construct identities. Narratives are an effective and adequate way through which one revises and edits past events with the present identity. (Brown 2006; Ricoeur 1991; Riessman 2008.)

Research, which focuses on individuals narrating their entrepreneurial narratives in order to understand the processes that make up entrepreneurial behavior and e.g. learning, is only emerging along with this century (Rae & Carswell 2000; 2001). Entrepreneurs, on individual level, are exposed to an interplay with their surroundings as well as inner factors that enable opportunity recognition (Rae & Carswell 2000: 220), but processes through which entrepreneurs acquire and utilize knowledge need further research. While the interest in entrepreneurship research has formerly been on the personality traits and studying the entrepreneur as an entity, the focus of present streams of research are shifting weight onto studying entrepreneurship as a rather complex construct (Rae & Carswell 2000: 220). For example, entrepreneurship in relation to evolvement over time or past experience or motivational aspects (Shane, Locke & Collins 2003) hasn't been under too much of interest while more covering aspects of external factors for action. (McMullen & Dimov 2013.)

The theoretical understanding of international entrepreneurship remains incomplete. While international business research and entrepreneurship research have tried to create a clearer field of international entrepreneurship research at their intersection and the growth of the number of studies on international entrepreneurship has been lagging (Keupp & Gassmann 2009; Gray & Farminer 2014), we may ask whether the starting point of international entrepreneurship research has enjoyed a firm stance in the first place. Much emphasis has been on internationalization theories, combining rather straightforwardly international business with entrepreneurship (Oviatt & McDougal 1994). Focus have possibly been too much on the types of internationalization processes or entry modes small companies have chosen, while the international entrepreneurship research may still lack much of the balancing input of the entrepreneurship perspective (Keupp & Gassmann 2009). According to Mainela, Puhakka and Servais (2014), research about international entrepreneurship would benefit from more weight put on studying entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation.

There is a growing need to understand the international entrepreneurship as a rather dynamic and multileveled process (Covin & Miller 2014) in which the international entrepreneurial orientation is an individual as well as organizational construct. It seems, that international entrepreneurship research does not sufficiently explain international entrepreneurial orientation, though the assumption has generally been that internationalization processes or the decision of entry to international markets are determined by the owner-manager's (read: individual level) international entrepreneurial orientation (Covin & Miller 2014).

Additionally, entrepreneurial identity construction is a less studied subject (Ollila, Middleton & Donnellon 2012), hence we may assume that international entrepreneurial identity is as well. The research field of international entrepreneurial identity and sense-making will therefore benefit from undertaking a study with the focus on individuals' identity construction processes. Understanding more of the inner processes the individuals are conducting, narrative approach as the methodological standpoint may eventually serve as a contextual and rich source of knowledge acquisition. Such is bound to go beyond strictly structured and moderated interviews or regulated data collection with an agenda

of more generalizable results. The interest is found in the idea of a life narrative to be of great value when it comes to sharing it with others in a more predestined manner helping one to “reweave their webs of beliefs and habits of action” (Tsoukas and Chia 2002: 577).

Hereafter, this research will be taking an intentional primary perspective on international entrepreneurs and focusing on making sense of their entrepreneurial and international orientation affecting the construction of the identity as an international entrepreneur. In order to understand the processes these international entrepreneurs have undertaken along their lifespan so far, I will be examining how they construct linkages between events through telling their life and career narratives. As narratives are a way to constitute past experience while they simultaneously provide ways for an individual to make sense of their past (Riessman 2008), I believe the narrative accounts will uncover insights for further international entrepreneurship research in relation to former theories on international business and entrepreneurship.

Acknowledging the need for a stronger theoretical understanding of international entrepreneurship and putting emphasis on the entrepreneur-perspective as well as recognizing the need for a better understanding of the process-like identity construction aspects of international entrepreneurship serve as the preliminary reasons why this research was conducted. These perspectives together create an interesting line of thought into this international entrepreneurship research, which may lead into filling in some of the gaps found in international entrepreneurship research field. A narrative research approach may benefit the research community by acknowledging the role of narrative meaning in order to comprehensively understand the identity construction and sense-making processes of international entrepreneurs. Therefore, this master’s thesis was an attempt to make sense of what it means to be an international entrepreneur by exploring the complex nature of international entrepreneurship.

In order to find the sense-making and identity construction processes, these international entrepreneurs were interviewed and their personal narratives analyzed. The methodological approach was chosen in order to enable a thorough perspective onto the subject and it was expected to give richer meaning for international entrepreneurship and the reasoning behind international venturing in the contemporary context. The interest covers the whole life journey, yet specifically from the day they started to build up an entrepreneurial identity to the point in which they consider themselves as a part of a larger identity construction, international entrepreneurship.

1.1 Research objective, problem and questions

The present research was started in order to follow the paths taken by experienced internationalized entrepreneurs. By listening to their unique life stories, it was expected to occur that something new, interesting and specifically beneficial

would come up in the process of this qualitative kind of research analyzing narratives of individuals. New perspective and understanding on something tacit about the identification and sense-making paths they've taken along their careers would surely benefit themselves but also current research on entrepreneurship and internationalization paths entrepreneurs may take. Figure 1 positions the research objective within the theoretical framework.

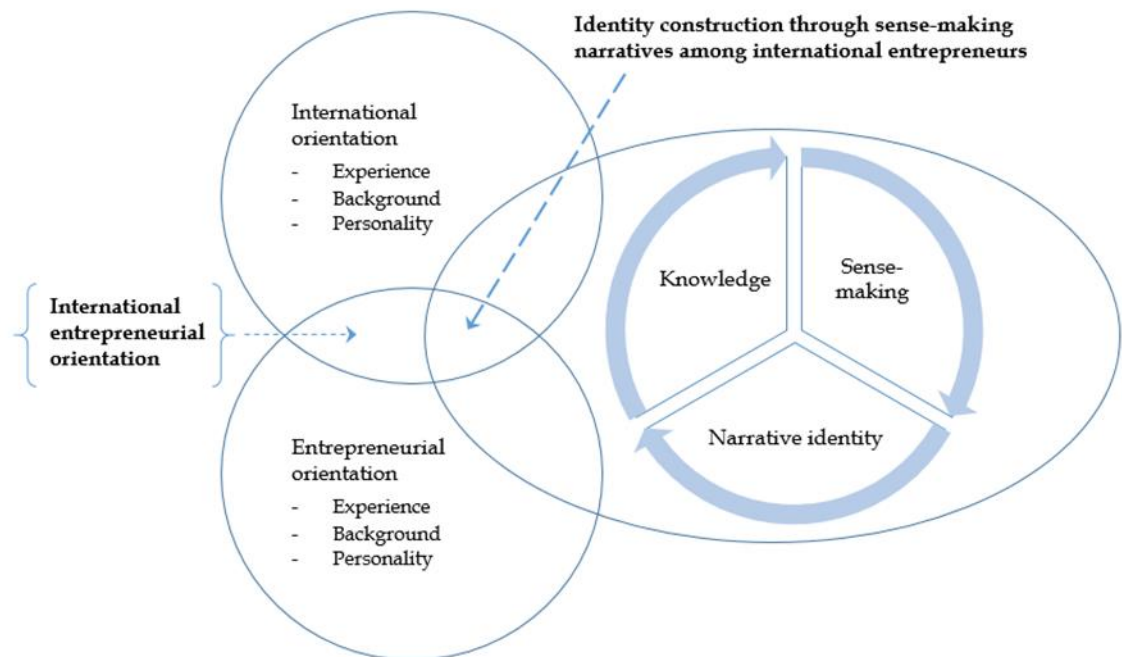


Figure 1 Research objective within the theoretical framework

Studying the sense-making narratives of the international entrepreneurs' stems from the former notions that entrepreneurship is recognized to be a process (Covin & Miller 2014), as "a journey" from sense-making and reasoning to action and materialization of ideas – be it an innovation or any kind of opportunity. Yet, research of entrepreneurship has gotten rather little attention in terms of the time and past experience whereas mainly focusing on the aspect of action. (McMullen & Dimov 2013.) Thus, it is interesting to cast a perspective of life history onto the entrepreneurial process through observing the journeys of the participants of this present research.

As such, entrepreneurs are a rather difficult group of people to identify in terms of the variety of characteristics they may represent, if no typical entrepreneur exists (Mitchell 1997). While research still mostly struggles to theorize entrepreneurship and processes leading into entrepreneurship as a career, we may perhaps assume that no one story or process is the right one, and it unlikely happens in a clear linear manner of construction. Therefore, derived from the previous, I shall here conclude as the starting point of this research to be that no less does a typical international entrepreneur or entrepreneurial journey into international venturing exist.

More precisely, the research objective was to detect sense-making processes behind the paths of becoming an international entrepreneur. This was done by exploring reasoning behind entrepreneurial orientation and international orientation, and thus revealing international entrepreneurial identity constructions through their narratives. Dimensions such as environment, enactment and self-reflection guided the analysis of finding meaningful factors guiding the journey of identity construction.

Here I list the steps (see Figure 2) leading the research design including the overall focusing question, the research problem as well as the research questions. The general focusing question leads to the formation of the research problem which moreover takes us to the research questions trying to generate solution to the problem. The research problem reflects the objective. The goal was essentially to gain deeper, yet useful, understanding over the sense-making processes and identity building of internationalized entrepreneurs and how these are embedded in their life history and experiences.

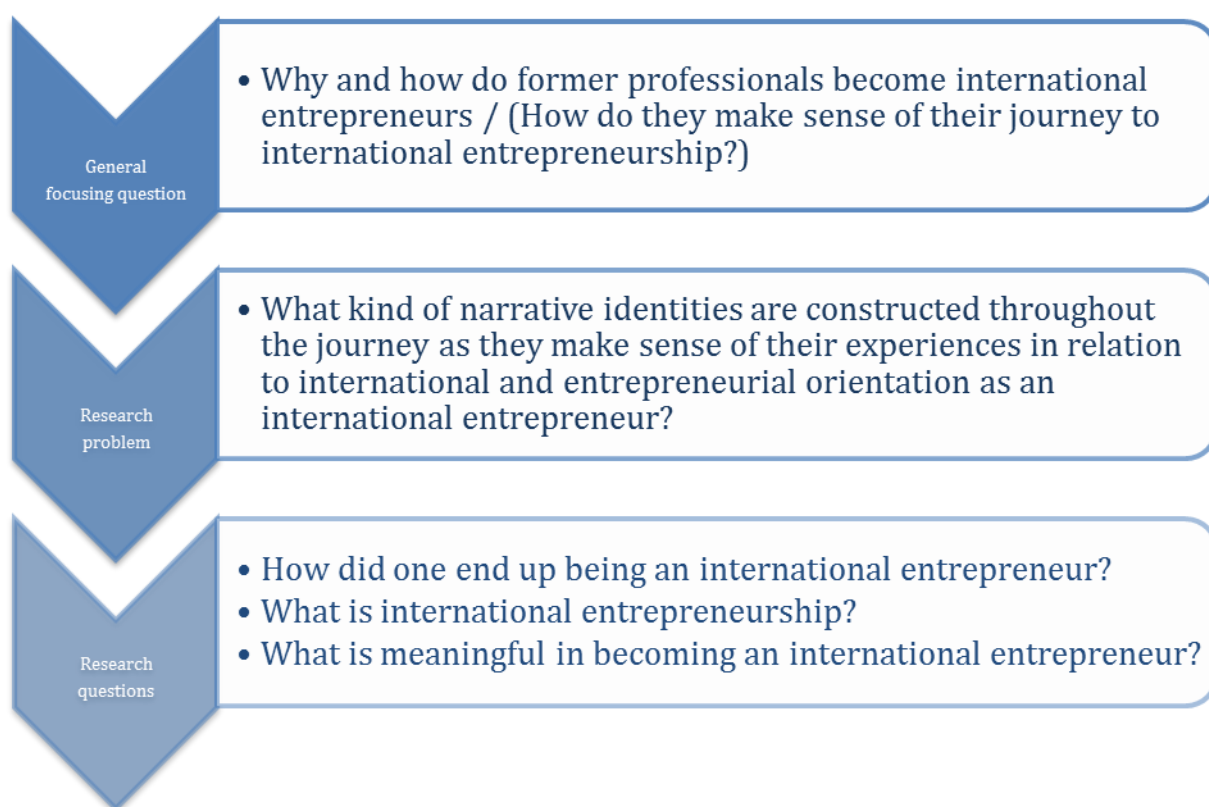


Figure 2 Research problem and questions

My research problem itself stems from the need to study more of the identity construction through narratives in order to reveal interesting issues of situational, social and personal aspects (Riessman 1993) international entrepreneurs say to be meaningful. This study wanted to gain explanatory understanding on how these sense-making paths get their form within the international context: what is the process of sense-making and identity construction in becoming an international entrepreneur. Additional interest in this study was the reasoning why

these entrepreneurs have taken a certain path; what have made sense to them when they narrate about their international entrepreneurship.

My preliminary research questions were formed on the basis of the interest former literature and research gaps in the field of international entrepreneurship are pointing me to (Mainela et al 2014). I expected the research problem as well as the questions to evolve along the research process, especially after the data collection via interviews. Though the research problem remained quite the same after the collection of the data, the research questions did actually get a more precise wording and form as the interviews were done and the analysis process went further.

The research questions that were formed on the basis of the latest in order to find the answers to the research problem are the following:

- How did one end up being an international entrepreneur?
- What is international entrepreneurship?
- What is meaningful in becoming an international entrepreneur?

In addition to these questions the non-directive narrative interview took free flowing streams into topics such as leadership, organizational culture, personal values, entrepreneurship and international business in general, which then generated more elaborative questions within the unique interview settings.

2 IDENTITY AND SENSE-MAKING

The theoretical base for the research is constructed on a multidisciplinary framework which combines theory and concepts from various research in social sciences. To keep it simple, though, the literature review and the formation of the theoretical framework will clearly state the perspectives and standing points in order to easily follow the research path of this study. For the purposes of a master's thesis, there is no time, need or real point in going into the very detail of every philosophical nuance with all the concepts and terms of the applied scientific disciplines, yet, the basic ideas and relevancy of each are presented and explained with care.

The previous research that will have influence on this present research is located in the various fields of research such as social, psychological, behavioral as well as economic sciences. I am currently interested in knowing how knowledge and identity are constructed among the internationalized entrepreneurs in a dialogue with their individual and social reality given their own dynamic living environments and past experiences. To root the definitions and theories onto former highly acknowledged research, this master's thesis acknowledges literature on sociology, social psychology, organization behavior, and entrepreneurship as well as research literature more specific on international business context. Culturally bound and contemporary internationalization processes are considered along the literature review.

Defining key terms and concepts as well as introducing the main theories will be done simultaneously as I proceed with reviewing the previously conducted and written research and literature. First, I will build up the framework for individual and personal identity construction as well as introduce theory related to the narrative research literature. Secondly, I continue with research literature on sense-making construction through life experiences. In the following chapter, I introduce the concept of international entrepreneurship among others to root my research into the right context.

2.1 Identity as a construction of self

In social sciences the concepts of 'self' and 'identity' are often considered rather vaguely distinct from each other. Thus, one should try to make some preliminary notions derived from the previous literature in order to define them well (Schwartz, Luyckx & Vignoles 2011). 'Self' as the mediator between the environment and individual's actions (Deaux 1992) reflects the cognitive perspective in social psychology.

Gee (2001) defines identity as the concept of who one is and how one is related to others. New dimensions of identity are explored and added when time goes by. Identities may vary from social to local identity, and for example from professional to narrative identity, and many times these different identities affect each other. Sub-branches of the identity construction constitute the whole of a person's identity. (Gee 2001; Zare-ee & Ghasedi 2014.)

Previously, research has considered self-concept as something active in relation to self-structure, be it defined in terms of hierarchies, networks, schemas or other structural dimensions (Markus & Wurf 1987). A multidimensional and multifaceted dynamic structure of the self-concept thus conveys us to identity which is formed through the multiplicity of identity (Markus & Wurf 1987). Since the definition of identity and its utilization in research is extremely fragmented and difficult to grasp as a one clear construct, I try to perceive identity and its dimensions from the following specific view point.

Wenger (1998: 145) argues that the process of building one's identity actually consists of "negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities". The present focus being in the entrepreneurs' self-narratives as a mean of gaining insight of their personal story and perceived purpose, in this research identity will be viewed as means of sense-giving for the participating professionals over their course of life events and experiences in their social context. Personally told events and experiences will be representing a story of how entrepreneurs then have been dealing with contradictions and decisions made in life (e.g. past vs. present) and how those have impacted their identity and self-conception.

Social identity theory and identity theory sees the "self" as reflexive, meaning that in relation to social categories and classifications one can take itself as an object and name oneself in particular ways (Stets & Burke 2000). Such a process means self-categorization (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell 1987) or identification (McCall and Simmons 1978) by which the identity is formed through the emergence of reflexive activity as a member of a group or role (Stets & Burke 2000).

To create specific borders to the definition of identity and what can be expressed of one's identity in this research, one must understand that biological and psychological characteristics as well as socio-demographic positions become part of one's identity only when they are interpreted and infused with personal and social meaning (Schwartz et al 2011). In this research, identity is defined

through personal identity, aspects of self-definition, which consider the individual's life story (Schwartz et al 2011; McAdams 2013).

Due to the methodological approach, I here narrow down the identity into the concept of narrative identity, meaning the construction and internalization of an evolving story of life (McAdams 2013: 233):

Narrative identity reconstructs the autobiographical past and imagines the future in such a way as to provide a person's life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning. -- Through narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future.

In the psychological research of individuals, it has long been noticed that self-narratives draw together and configure events of the narrator's life into coherent themes, those in which personal narratives create a version of "the general cultural stock of stories" and a way of expressing one's identity (Polkinghorne 1988). While I consider the narrative identity of the participants, I will be taking a certain perspective to code the narrative accounts as it becomes current in the form of analysis.

Identity as a powerful construct guiding life paths, usually tries to answer a question "who are you?" through which it absorbs an instant complexity into it (Schwartz et al 2011). The question of 'who are you', with a complex meaning, can also be asked from oneself and thus turns into 'who am I?' It may also be 'who do I think I am' or 'how I act as being' and therefore creates a diversity of answers and considerations when it comes to research approaches (Schwartz et al 2011).

As an interesting point on the construction on identity is that it may change over time. Relevant to the present study, we must acknowledge two mechanisms affecting the change in identity. Burke (2006: 81) argues that "changing identity standards redefines who one is". Identity standards represent those meaning and norms that a person associates with a particular role or a group one is part of (McCall & Simmons 1978; Stets & Burke 2000). The change in one's identity include the changes of meaning of "what it means to who one is" - as a person, in a role or as a member of a group (Burke 2006: 92).

Though identities are - into some extent - resistant to change, they still slowly respond to persistent pressure in two ways. Firstly, such changing in identity is found to be possible as one adaptively responds to a certain socialization effect, thus, aligns one's perceptions with a new situation or culture where the meanings are different. Secondly, an adaptive response occurs when two identities sharing common dimensions of meaning in their standards become more alike, in other words through a role acquisition. (Burke 2006.)

2.2 Making sense of life experiences

One of the main interests of this research is to follow the international entrepreneurial path of sense-making and identity construction by analyzing the narratives of the participants from their former profession to international entrepreneurship. Therefore, it will be important to understand the essence of the concept of sense-making as well as clarify its borders with the concepts closely related to the phenomena of making sense of ones experiences and life. To uncover these sense-making paths and identity construction processes that entrepreneurs with international businesses have undertaken, I continue to define the theory construction as well as key terms in order to get an overview of the whole framework.

Sense-making, as worded in the work of Chater & Loewenstein (2015), is a fundamental human motivation and serves as a drive to simplify the representation of the world around us. Individuals are thus prone towards decoding their life in a way that is positive and makes sense (Chater & Loewenstein 2015). In Wenger's work (1998) living and all of our mundane experiences we encounter in the constantly ongoing interaction with the world is the process of negotiation of meaning. Such negotiation is done through active and dynamic relation to our engagement with our surroundings and inner world, through discourse or without, direct or indirect interaction with others. (Wenger 1998.)

The concept of sense-making derives from following basic assumptions which are adapted from Dervin's research on sense-making (1998). First and foremost, human beings are diverse and unique and everyone has also their special limitations. Through this unique basis, the second assumption is that human behavior creates certain perceptions and meanings which serve as means of survival and action in changing circumstances. The third assumption is that the world is imperfect and full of "gaps". As our existence remains imperfect, also our concepts and definitions for things are imperfect. Thus, communication and gathering of information becomes discontinuous by nature. The imperfect world and flow of things is then followed by the assumption that routines are broken and it is seen as problematic. Problematic issues are therefore reversed back to the familiar, non-problematic or alternatively, one may try to come up with a new approach to those problems. (Dervin 1998.)

In line with the view of Dervin (1998), sense making becomes thus the kind of organizing activity of knowledge of the past, present and future. It remains embedded in time and space, "moving from a history toward a horizon, made at the juncture between self and culture, society, organization." (Dervin 1998). Based on the integration of the former theories and thoughts in the narrative research domain of human experience and storytelling, Vilma Hänninen (1999) talks about narrative flow, representing the mental process individuals go over as they try to make sense of their lives in which different events and actions have taken place.

The question in researching life change and processes is many times "how people go through and survive difficult changes in life by giving (or making)

sense for the events.” Research in general sees sense-giving (or making) as “a creative and cultural meanings utilizing process that roots from the individual’s life situation and history.” (Hänninen 1999: 73.) Such perspective, thus, tries to understand the process of how people give purpose to their realities and appropriate their actions. Sense-making has been agreed to have notable connection with identity recognition whereas life events including decision making and change have an impact on the sense-making process in particular. (Brown, Colville & Pye 2015.)

What is interesting, is how the sense-making processes include the individual’s cultural stock of narratives and how one makes use of them (Hänninen 1999). This highlights the importance of the social and cultural context as well as communicational and interactional aspects (Brown 2014; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). The social and situational aspects are also essential in terms of understanding the processes in international entrepreneurship and in the entrepreneurs’ journeys into sense-making, construction and reflection of one’s identity in the broader context.

By following the certain perspective of this research, it must be noted that narrative research literature defines the narrative in relation to sense-making as well. Therefore, narratives are considered to serve not only as the research approach for this research but also as a mode of knowing and communication (Czarniawska 2004; Bruner 1986). In this research I take the perspective in which a narrative is viewed as a mode of knowing, consisting of organizing experience (Bruner 1986; Czarniawska 2004) in which the meaning of specific events become visible as represented in a ‘plot’ (Polkinghorne 1988). Therefore, while generally science tends to organize separate events into a chronological order in terms of finding a law-type connection or a causal relationship between things, narrative knowing leaves those connections open for a negotiation of meaning. Same events may gain various meanings, in other words organized around different plots, as a result of competing interpretations. (Czarniawska 2004; Polkinghorne 1988.)

It might be questioned that spoken language, such as orally presented narratives, cannot serve as absolute and true replica of what a person thinks or has experienced, since language itself is only a mean of communicating inner reality or meaning. A narrative in this perspective serves only as a reflection an outer meaning, formed by language and cultural categorizations of words and expressions for things. (Vygotski 1982.) Thus, I may acknowledge the fact that the “inner story” one thinks or experiences can never be truly expressed to others orally so that they comprehensively understand the extent of that other person’s past and present interpretation of reality.

According to Riessman (2008), narratives often serve with different purposes for individuals than for groups. During the recent years there has been emerging research on understanding how organizational processes, sense-making and identity building of organizations as well as individuals can benefit from the narrative approaches (Rae & Carswell 2001; Chater & Loewenstein 2015). Groups tend to use narratives to mobilize socially or form a sense of unity and belonging (Riessman 2008), and thus, narratives seem to be a potential outlet for

organizations to create that dynamisms within as well as in relation to the outside world.

For individuals, it has been concluded broadly in psychological research that narrative accounts and self-narratives improve well-being and understanding of one's life experiences. Many times, people have a natural urge to make sense and seek relationships between past events in their living environment. (Pennebaker & Seagal 1999.) Furthermore, often these purposes narratives serve within groups overlap with the ones it has for individuals. Though, narratives may have a different primary function for an individual telling stories, in a social sense there is always a narrator and audience to narratives, whether it'd be self or someone apart of self or an organization. (Riessman 2008.)

Thus, the functions of narratives have the role of constructing past events or actions in order to construct a meaningful life and claim identity. In order to make sense of events and actions, individuals tell their story in certain ways and with particular prioritizing. The identity construction processes of the international entrepreneurs and their journeys into international entrepreneurship thus integrate the concepts of identity and self-reflection as well as the sense-making process derived from the previous life experiences.

3 INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The previous chapter on identity construction and sense-making processes is hereupon followed by a literature review of international entrepreneurship research. These two theory sections are considered to constitute the whole theoretical framework of this master's thesis drawn together and visually presented in the introduction chapter (see Figure 1) along with the research problem and questions (Figure 2).

The beginning of the present chapter reviews the entrepreneurship and international entrepreneurship research field. The concept of international entrepreneurial orientation is introduced and defined in order to clarify the framework into which the sense-making of experience and identity construction processes of international entrepreneurs may fall.

3.1 The international entrepreneurship research domain

Over the past 30 years research on entrepreneurship has gained momentum in business and management research and other social sciences in various ways. Studies spread across the research community with great interest from interdisciplinary approaches to more simplistic views on the phenomenon, including many different perspectives and research agendas. Such fragmented and multidisciplinary field of research has had its challenges in terms of finding clear and legitimate groundings and a conceptual framework. (Ferreira, Reis & Miranda 2015.) The large pool of perspectives and entries to the field force my own research to take a solid stance in the subject of entrepreneurship. By reviewing and narrowing down the variety of perspectives on entrepreneurship enables me to furthermore look at international entrepreneurship with a proper lens.

The different, yet in some ways overlapping, definitions of entrepreneurship do not make it easy to build up the framework of international entrepreneurship. Thus, I may go on and say that there is a lack of truly unequivocal definition for an international entrepreneur and for international entrepreneurship as well. Throughout the attempts to gather entrepreneurship under the same

umbrella of definition, it has been adopted as a subfield in various research disciplines (Ács & Audretsch 2010) and therefore fragmentation of its meaning is inevitable. As a rough deduction of this, one could argue that defining international entrepreneurship is suffering the same effects of fragmentation and lack of balance in its orientation. While entrepreneurship still seeks for the boundaries of the research field and, yet, balance between aspects of different research disciplines, the international business research attempts to catch an all-embracing scope of different organizational processes of both small and large firms in the global environment.

To make a notion of the most important perspectives in the overall entrepreneurship research in respect of this study, I will next discuss relevant definitions from different social science research disciplines. International entrepreneurship will then build onto these notions as I go further. Much of the interest is paid on conceptualizing international entrepreneurship orientation within the international entrepreneurship research.

My research review on entrepreneurship in the international context, at the end, will not try to make a case of an all-embracing definition of international entrepreneurship, but I try to look at international entrepreneurship as something quite a complex, broad and dynamic construct. International entrepreneurship is in interplay with various perspectives that are constructed by the international and entrepreneurial orientation of a person. Therefore, I believe, such an outlook will help to understand the unique complexity of the twists and turns a journey into international entrepreneurship may take.

3.1.1 Entrepreneurship and international business

The variety among entrepreneurs and their venture creation processes is vast and researchers have struggled to come into a conclusion with balanced conceptual framework for entrepreneurship (Gartner 2004; Shane & Venkataraman 2000). Research on entrepreneurship has had its difficulties to form a unique conceptual domain and when it comes to developing understanding of certain phenomena, which are not sufficiently explained by other fields of research (Shane & Venkataraman 2000).

Management and business studies are possibly the most obvious fields of discipline reckoning entrepreneurship in their literature. Due to the fundamental assumptions under and nature of entrepreneurial activity and orientation (emphasizing risk-taking, innovative approaches and proactiveness), entrepreneurship has been noticed to be one of the important factors evoking economic growth and development in the modern open economies (Wennekers & Thurik 1999; Toma, Grigore & Marinescu 2014). It is moreover a relevant topic when discussing national economic output and labor employment (Busenitz, West III, Shepherd, Nelson, Chandler & Zacharakis 2003) as new opportunities emerge as a result of technological disruptions, volatility of economies as well as changes in demographics (Toma et al 2014), including the international internet-enabled markets (Reuber & Fischer 2011).

Business and management research as well as entrepreneurship research, have paid increasing interest towards international business, internationalization and the international orientation of businesses and thus, research on international entrepreneurship has gotten momentum during recent years (Keupp & Gassmann 2009; Mainela et al 2014). Before coming to the new century, studies on entrepreneurship and international business had not been brought into the same stage, meaning that research on entrepreneurship had been focusing on the domestic context of the business whereas international business had its focus on large multinational companies (McDougal & Oviatt 2000). Now, the importance of developing the research of international entrepreneurship from the perspective of entrepreneurship, rather than international business and organizational culture, has gotten attention (Keupp & Gassmann 2009).

Adapting from former international business research, Fletcher (2004: 289) defines international business to be the constitution of “a variety of transactions and exchanges that are carried out across national borders to satisfy the needs of individuals, customers and organizations”. Such a general definition includes all sorts of ventures that have engaged in cross-border trade and business. Due to the acknowledgement of small and medium sized companies increasing their percentage among all the businesses acting in the international markets across national borders, the interest of business research has grown in order to make sense of international behavior of smaller firms. (Fletcher 2004.)

Recently, in international entrepreneurship research, two mainstreams have emerged. One stream has been focusing on international new ventures (INVs), or synonymously “born globals”, while the other focuses on established companies with international entrepreneurial activities. (Covin & Miller 2014.) The entrepreneurs interviewed in this research has more or less established INVs and thus, relevancy is found in the first stream of international entrepreneurship research. INVs are those companies who gain competitive advantage through sourcing inputs and making sales in international markets from inception (Oviatt & McDougall 1994). Coviello (2006) has argued that especially the knowledge-intensive INVs have expertise to exploit new market opportunities, develop innovative services and processes through networking. Also Debrulle and Maes (2015: 171) have acknowledged the importance of “knowledge, and the mechanisms to acquire, transfer, and exploit knowledge”, and considered them as vital sources of an entrepreneurial venture’s international success and competitive advantage.

Along with the technological development and rapid advancements over the past decades, lower trade barriers as well as increased global competition has enabled companies – in the size of large, medium and small enterprises – to internationalize their activities and many times already during their first couple of years after establishment (Andersson 2011; Oviatt & McDougall 2005a). With the international orientation towards global business, large companies began to enhance their competitive advantage by leveraging their market reach over the national borders. INVs, a contrast to the gradual internationalization processes, find their initial business model and orientation to be international from the scratch. (Oviatt & McDougall 2005a; Fernández Olmos & Díez-Vial 2015.)

International entrepreneurship thus covers those organizations that “from inception, [seek] to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries” (Oviatt & McDougall 1994). Therefore, if we drop the concept of traditional internationalization processes such as Johanson and Vahlne’s (1977) Uppsala model, we can focus on the founders of small entrepreneurial companies that have been born more or less global and started their international business operations within the first couple of years of their establishment.

Studies have been pointing out the differences between internationalization processes of multinational firms and those colored by a more entrepreneurial approach (Jones & Coviello 2005). Whether a small company becomes international depends extensively on how the entrepreneur perceives international markets and the international opportunities out there in relation to the resources and capability aspects. (Jones & Coviello 2005; Schweizer, Vahlne & Johansson 2010.) That said, the discussion must shift from international business and internationalization processes to international entrepreneurship and entrepreneur since the interest is not in the organization but the individual per se.

3.1.2 International entrepreneurial opportunity

According to Shane and Venkataraman (2000), entrepreneurship is characterized by two phenomena inseparable from each other. The first phenomenon constructing the definition is the presence and identification of profitable opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman 2000) for creating or releasing value. The other phenomenon emerge in the presence of an individual taking on and forming a venture (Shane & Venkataraman 2000), bringing together resources in order to exploit the identified opportunities (Rae & Carswell 2000). A definition based on only one of these would lead to an incomplete understanding of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs as a composition of multitude of factors (Shane & Venkataraman 2000). By acknowledging the existence of the phenomena of the international entrepreneurial opportunity, we may later on enable a better discussion on the phenomena of international entrepreneurship. Opportunity itself is not in the focus, yet defining it properly gives us more knowledge of the context in which the international entrepreneurship may take place. That said, I preliminary suggest that reasoning and motivation behind international entrepreneurship may depend on certain issues related to the concept of international entrepreneurial opportunity.

The core spirit defining entrepreneurship is therefore “the discovery and exploitation of profitable opportunities” (Shane & Venkataraman 2000: 217). Approaching a holistic view on international entrepreneurship, we must acknowledge three aspects of the definition of entrepreneurship: (1) the sources of opportunities, (2) the processes which lead into the discovery and exploitation of opportunities and (3) the individuals who take on the process of discovering and exploiting opportunities. (Shane & Venkataraman 2000.) Sarasvathy, Dew, Velamuri, and Venkataraman (2003: 79), define an opportunity to be ‘a set of

ideas, beliefs and actions that enable the creation of future goods and services in the absence of current markets for them’.

To consider first the source of opportunities, we may state that international opportunities are found in situations “that both spans and integrates elements from multiple national contexts in which entrepreneurial action and interaction transform the manifestations of economic activity” while they also “evolve and are actualized in culturally, historically and institutionally ambiguous settings.” (Mainela et al 2014: 120.) As such, the concept of international opportunity means a cross-disciplinary field within the international entrepreneurship research (Mainela et al 2014).

The social constructionist view on entrepreneurial opportunity recognition, moreover the international entrepreneurial opportunity recognition as well, includes the individual with the social and organizational aspects. The social constructionist groundings reflect the epistemological groundings of the present study. Such perspective identifies opportunities as more or less grounded in cultural understanding and researchers argue that the process “requires subjective creation among people influenced by their social milieu” (Oviatt & McDougall 2005a).

The economist’s view on an opportunity builds on the realist ontological position that the opportunities exist independent of individual’s knowledge (Ács & Audretsch 2010) meaning that an opportunity has the potential and “the possible outcome” regardless of the individual’s approach to it. Such approach differs largely from the constructionist view in which the opportunity is found in the reality of an individual and it is subject to interpretation socially (Ács & Audretsch 2010). The constructionist view therefore contradicts with the objective opportunity view, in which the entrepreneurial process is seen as individual, cognitive and apart from social or collective creation of opportunities (Shane et al 2003).

What is essential in the economist view on an entrepreneur though, together with the financial disciplines it acknowledges the importance and profitability of entrepreneurship. The presence of entrepreneurship in the economic change and growth is clear and it has been noted to be one of the sources of “industrial dynamism, wealth creation and innovation” as it interacts with the economy (Parker 2009; 1). Furthermore, entrepreneurs often recognize the disequilibrium opportunities and exploit them in the market state in which there is imperfect information and competition (Parker 2009) such as the global business environment.

Though Shane et al (2003) opposes the social constructionist view and argues that opportunities exist independent of the actors, he acknowledges that no opportunity comes to life without human agency and motivation, and a level of creativity. According to Lindgren and Packendorff (2009), the social constructionist view on entrepreneurship fundamentally embraces pluralism and thus accepts different meanings about what entrepreneurship is. It embraces a creative view on the entrepreneurial process and observes the universe of opportunities as socially constructed. (Lindgren & Packendorff 2009.)

With the above discussion on sources of opportunities, we may go on to the second aspect of the phenomena of entrepreneurial opportunity, the process of discovery and exploitation of opportunities. Acknowledging the social constructionist view, the process which leads into the discovery and exploitation of opportunities is bound to social and environmental circumstances and reflects more than just an individual's cognition isolated from outside effects. Weick (1995) includes the enactment of opportunities into the definition of entrepreneurship in addition to the simple discovery and exploitation of them. The enactment means that people act and furthermore interpret the creations of their actions. Those creations may then be evaluated and noticed to have economic value and, in other words, serve as economic opportunities. (Oviatt & McDougall 2005a.)

The third aspect to consider in the entrepreneurial opportunity phenomena is the individual, the entrepreneur, who takes on the process of discovering and exploiting opportunities. With this notion I suggest you to take a look at the next section of this chapter, in which I introduce and define the concept of international entrepreneurial orientation. By doing that, we may cast a more thorough view on the international entrepreneur as an agent in his/her own circumstantial environment utilizing the cultural stock of experience to construct identity (Hänninen 1999). Understanding of the process of constructing identity of an international entrepreneur includes therefore a closer examination of the process of becoming internationally and entrepreneurially oriented and eventually enacting upon international entrepreneurial opportunities.

Considering strongly the research of Oviatt and McDougall (2005a; 2005b) on international entrepreneurship, the definition of international entrepreneurship incorporates Shane & Venkataraman's (2000) and Weick's (1995) elements on entrepreneurship and takes it to the global context. International entrepreneurship is therefore "the discovery, enactment, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities that reach across national borders to create future goods and services" (Oviatt & McDougall 2005a: 540). Consequently, the definition of international entrepreneurship builds on the concept of the discovery, enactment, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities that are not limited by national borders. Yet, the field of international entrepreneurship should increasingly examine "how, by whom, and with what effects those opportunities are acted upon" as the definition of international entrepreneurship keeps evolving (Oviatt & McDougall 2005b: 7.)

3.2 Defining international entrepreneurial orientation

Entrepreneurial orientation is a phenomenon considered to be the force driving entrepreneurial activities. Be it the activities and decisions made by individuals or in an organizational context, entrepreneurial orientation has been defined in various ways along the rising interest of entrepreneurship research as well as management research in general. The fragmented work over the phenomenon of entrepreneurial activity have drawn scholars' attention in terms of defining the

phenomenon more precisely. (Covin & Wales 2011; Wales 2016.) The construct of entrepreneurial orientation is one of the most established constructs in entrepreneurship research (Wales 2016), giving it high value in the discussion over entrepreneurial behavior and decision-making processes.

As a phenomenon, entrepreneurial orientation has its background in the strategy research which, with variance, has discovered basic entrepreneurial orientation as a strategy-making mode in which new opportunities are searched in uncertain environments (Mintzberg 1973; Covin & Wales 2011). Along the last century, the notions of the risky and relatively aggressive decision-making strategies of organizations or individuals in business has prompted more studies on entrepreneurial behavior and activity and thus, it has been given many different labels, such as entrepreneurial style (Sadler-Smith, Hampson, Chaston & Badger 2003) and posture (Covin & Slevin 1991).

The formation of such construction has had its challenges as the measurement of entrepreneurial orientation is questionable among researchers. Yet, common denominators are known and widely accepted, such measurement scale dimensions being the innovative approach, proactiveness to the market, and risk-taking in relation to the environment and decision-making. (Covin & Wales 2011.) In addition to the dimensions of Covin & Wales (2011), Lumpkin, Cogliser & Schneider (2009) recognize the importance of the concepts of autonomy. In the midst of creating the concept of entrepreneurial orientation, the researchers have initially had the objective to answer the question of what it means to be entrepreneurial (Miller 2011; Covin & Miller 2014). Therefore, I may suggest that also the concept of international entrepreneurial orientation tries to grasp the meaning of being "internationally entrepreneurial".

In addition to theory and conceptual work of the meaning of entrepreneurial orientation, more practical implications of entrepreneurial orientation have been recognized in relation to intrapreneurship (Felício, Rodrigues & Caldeirinha 2012) or corporate entrepreneurship and its effects on performance (Covin & Slevin 1991; Covin & Lumpkin 2011). Yet, the present study won't be looking for concrete outcomes or implicational effects of being internationally entrepreneurially oriented; the focus is on the meaning of the concept itself and the identification process constructed by the participants through experience and life.

In the research literature entrepreneurial companies - not to say individuals - that have an early international orientation, will go overseas rapidly after establishment. Also they may choose the international market right at the point of inception of their business activities, and are therefore called the 'early internationalizing firms'. (Andersson 2011.) The entrepreneurial orientation incorporated with the concept of an early international orientation would simplistically mean international entrepreneurial orientation. Yet, the discussion here may need to shift its focus from "how entrepreneurial companies go abroad" to "why does establishing an internationally oriented company make sense for an entrepreneur".

Crick (2009) suggest that entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial behavior and orientation starts long before one establishes a firm. The time between the

thoughts or discovery of ideas and the actual enactment of entrepreneurial opportunities may become prolonged due to family, educational or even employment reasons before the real life in entrepreneurship can be pursued. (Crick 2009). For example, employment may hinder a person from thorough investigation on opportunities and business ideas. Sometimes meeting people in the corporate world, or even university settings, generate new business ideas and “unofficial” partnerships that take time to form into a registered business venture due to the restrictions the employment or sets. (Crick 2009.)

International entrepreneurial orientation and moreover international entrepreneurship would arguably enjoy the same evolving path-like historical perspective that takes time to become reality as concrete actions in a person’s life. Though, the actual implementation of international business or the start of global operations in reality may start later on and only after establishing the actual business, the international (business) orientation of the entrepreneur can get its form much earlier in life. Conducting this research was therefore an attempt to investigate more closely, in a personal manner, how do internationalized entrepreneurs make sense and meaning of their story of becoming international and what has affected decision making processes and choices in terms of education, career and other life events and why.

3.2.1 Entrepreneurial and international experience

The entrepreneurial experience as such might have been given less attention than it may have deserved (Morris et al 2012; Schindehutte, Morris & Allen 2006) and it is one reason this research finds it interesting to study the experienced events of the research objects. As it is argued that too much of the research of entrepreneurship has been focusing on the mind-set and personality traits that entrepreneurial people possess (who are they?) and their actions (what do they do?) (Shane & Venkataraman 2000), the study on entrepreneurship would increasingly benefit from the discussion on experienced events and the aspects of new venture creation (Morris et al 2012) and the development of entrepreneurial career over time (McMullen & Dimov 2013).

Questions lingering above the desire to understand more of entrepreneurship concern the development of the entrepreneurial mind-set , the perspective in this study is therefore that “individuals ‘experience’ venture creation” (Morris et al 2012). Moreover, in the international business context, I detect the need to know more of the development from professional to entrepreneur to international entrepreneur and what kind of role does experience play in the development process.

In this research, entrepreneurship is seen as a [human] process (McMullen & Dimov 2013; Moroz & Hindle 2012; Toma et al 2014). As an action-based phenomenon integrating furthermore creative, strategic and organizing processes (Moroz & Hindle 2012) this process orientation on entrepreneurship embraces change and action in which the entrepreneur is the central actor. As it is in the behavioral model of entrepreneurship, behavior and action gives meaning to the entrepreneurial process, rather than attributes or certain psychological profiles

(Covin & Slevin 1991). Thus, entrepreneurs are known through their actions and activity, making behavior one of the key elements in the process of entrepreneurship.

The process of entrepreneurship includes the individual (entrepreneur) who takes agency in order to pursue a possibility (McMullen & Shepherd 2006) by forming an advantageous set of resources and mobilizing them from a lower productivity level to a higher one (Toma et al 2014). While they make the effort worth the while, entrepreneurs are thought to have the will to take on responsibilities and possess the ability to concretize ideas into action, "serving as an agent for change" (Toma et al 2014: 438).

Experience and former knowledge are acknowledged to affect the entrepreneurial development and change (Morris, Kuratko, Schindehutte & Spivack 2012) and the management literature finds them as valuable resources for an individual (Debrulle & Maes 2015) as they go on creating a new venture and starting their entrepreneurial career also internationally. Internationalization and entrepreneurship are seen as similar processes pointed out by researchers (Andersson 2011). Hence, the more we know about the entrepreneur and their "internal" sense-making path, the more the international entrepreneurial process becomes visible. Knowledge and managerial experience has been recognized to have a role in small companies' internationalization processes (Debrulle & Maes 2015). Though the physical resources, be it money or other assets, are seen important as one starts to build up a startup and start self-employment, in this research I focus on the knowledge and skill-based assets and experience.

Furthermore, if the process of becoming an entrepreneur is evolving in nature and much relying on former experience and knowledge-based resources, we may detect a connection between the process of becoming an entrepreneur and the process of making sense from experience and life history. As in Chater & Loewenstein's (2015) work, the fundamental human motivation of sense-making is the drive to simplify the representation of the world around us, and therefore we may assume it is same the case with entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial life experiences. Even the mundane experiences one encounter's in the constant interaction with the world is the process of negotiation of meaning. It is thus active and dynamic engagement with the surroundings as well as the internal world (Wenger 1998.)

As a sum up we may say that being an entrepreneur is a "work in progress" (Morris et al 2012) involving the processes of sense-making and exploitation of former experience, unfolding of current and producing new, catalyzed by the individual agency and social environment. Agency, in this case, refers to the capacity for a human being to make choices, and here I shall draw the focus on the entrepreneurial process of sense-making into action-making as these agents (entrepreneurs) ponder alternatives in relation to their social context (Archer 2000; Brown 2006) e.g. networks and other interactional relations. Furthermore, it is important to note that sense-making and the overall reasons for becoming an entrepreneur, as well as international entrepreneur, may be stretched into a rather wide range.

Reasons for becoming an entrepreneur has been studied and some of them have been considering whether entrepreneurship is the result of external environmental factors or more of a result of human agency. (Shane et al 2003; Dawson & Henley 2012). Such perspectives have yet somewhat overlooked the individual citations of their reasons for choosing self-employment (Dawson & Henley 2012). It is also so, that internationalization research has covered the push and pull factors of going international in the organizational and firm level (Etemad 2004; Mejri & Umemoto 2010), but no particularly significant research is done in order to investigate the reasons for international entrepreneurship per se.

Generally speaking, entrepreneurship research has detected different reasons for becoming and being an entrepreneur (Dawson & Henley 2012). Economic crisis, raising the numbers of unemployment, increases the push into self-employment as work opportunities must be created by oneself. Some positive reasons are related to the opportunity recognition, financial or autonomy aspects of self-employment. Factors reasoning the becoming an entrepreneur can be categorized into “push” and “pull” factors – an individual’s “push” and “pull” motives. Such motives may be moreover categorized to be negative and positive entrepreneurial motivations. (Dawson & Henley 2012.) The entrepreneurial opportunity is one of these factors affecting personal motivation and serves as one key motive for establishing a business.

Experiences are affective in nature and events taking place in the course of life are represent the “fabric of the entrepreneurial experience” (Gartner et al 2004). Such “fabric” is nuanced by experience both domestically and internationally, thus making it also international (or cultural) experience. Much of the entrepreneurial experience can be said to be built on certain processes of experimentation through which an entrepreneur gains knowledge of things and substance that one hasn’t had before. (Gartner et al 2004.) According to Gartner et al (2004) this means that “knowledge required to be successful cannot be known in advance or deduced from some set of first principles.” The entrepreneurial risk-taking, proactiveness and innovativeness becomes evident in such a process of experimenting. In Mejri and Umemoto’s (2010) study, such experiential knowledge in the context of SME internationalization would include network knowledge, cultural knowledge, and entrepreneurial knowledge, whereas e.g. market knowledge is explicit, obtained as the objective information about the international market.

3.2.2 International and entrepreneurial identity

As stated earlier in Chapter 1, the process of building one’s identity consists of the negotiation of meanings of experiences of membership in social communities (Wenger 1998). Such a process includes the identification (McCall and Simmons 1978) by which the identity is formed through the emergence of reflexive activity as a member of a group or role.

In this research, I believe that through the narrative identity these international entrepreneurs were accounting, they would convey to themselves and to

the listener who they are now and how they came to be (McAdams 2013). It covers the questions of 'who am I?', 'who do I think I am?' and 'how I act as a being?' (Schwartz et al 2011). Since the participants are set into the context of their own international entrepreneurship as individuals, they were asked to convey the personal experience and knowledge throughout the accounts. In order to gain a holistic view in the analysis process, interest was found in examining accounts on intrapersonal, interpersonal as well as cultural aspects of experience (Fraser 2004).

The individual perspective taken sets key importance on personal life journey on both international experiences as well as entrepreneurial experiences. Therefore, we may more or less rely on the narratives to be accounts communicating personal perspective and construction of identity. The narrative identity construction of international entrepreneurship, including the sense-making of international experiences as well as the entrepreneurial experiences, is found in the intersection of what one identifies oneself to be in terms of being international and entrepreneurial. As a glance back to the previous section, being international is the international orientation and being entrepreneurial is the entrepreneurial orientation, if we consider an orientation to be answering a preliminary question of 'what it means to be [entrepreneurial]' (Miller 2011; Covin & Miller 2014).

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Qualitative research

This research follows the ontological assumption that reality is understood subjectively. Epistemological groundings of the research are therefore in inductive logic and more deeply in social constructionism, meaning abruptly that reality is viewed as something that does not exist outside individuals. (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls & Ormston 2013; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008.) Thus, the viewpoint is that two identical realities do not exist, whereas “reality” is always an interpretation of an individual – or a group (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). Moreover, knowledge is built “bottom up” through observations of the surrounding world (Ritchie et al 2013) which roughly means that perceptions and experiences vary from person to person and change over time and, especially, across and within different context.

Qualitative research and the constructionist view describes the social nature of reality. In constructionism, social actors produce social reality through social interactions, and additionally change in views are possible; reality is socially constructed as another person’s understanding shapes the other person’s understanding. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008.) Hence, the understanding is developed by using experiences and interactions with other people. On the contrary, quantitative research has its ontological stance on objectivism and follows the deductive logic of testing hypothesis formed out of theoretical propositions. Objectivism claims that the social world exists independently of people and actions remaining “outside” of those social actors (including any participant or researcher) concerned with their existence. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009.)

Therefore, the logical choice of an approach for this study on the life stories and experiences of the internationalized entrepreneurs was the qualitative research approach. The methodology and research approach is further justified with the nature of the phenomenon being in focus. I wanted to study the processes of sense-making and the construction of identity through experiences and life events. These realities that the participants have are thus treated as socially created yet individual and unique. I acknowledge the fact that the new knowledge through this research is produced by exploring and understanding

the social reality of the participants and thus focuses on the interpretations and meaning that they give to their surrounding world. (Ritchie et al 2013.) While the research data is already interpretation and full of assumptions and bias, my views are also constructing meaning and interpretations of what I hear and learn. The research process is affecting the reality and this surely cannot be considered to be an objective study on the phenomenon, even though the aim is to minimize the researcher's own presumptions and inner theories by transparently reporting the research process. (Ritchie et al 2013.)

My job as a researcher is to interpret these narratively constructed realities as good as possible, and deliver something new to the field of entrepreneurship research. The approach of my research is sincerely inductive, rooted relatively at the end of the interpretivist research philosophy as positivism locates at the other far end (Saunders et al 2009). To place it into contrast with interpretivist, the positivist philosophy argues that knowledge is foundational and reality can be known accurately (Ritchie et al 2013) as it is produced through our senses rather than our own interpretation and attempts to give meaning of the surroundings. Positivism tries to achieve the objective description of the prevalent forces in the world (Riessman 1993) as it has adopted the rational approach. Thus, if I would've adopted a deductive approach and a positivist stance, I should have had a clear theoretical proposition and a strategy designed for testing that proposition (Saunders et al 2009). That would have placed me as a researcher outside the realm of study to observe the phenomenon (Riessman 1993).

Now, as in any qualitative research, my research process is allowed to shape up as I go further and try to make sense out of my research data. Though, the experiences and accounts of the research participants are impossible to decode absolutely equally as they are in the participants heads, some valuable findings can be made through a thorough and transparent analysis process. My theoretical framework was not finished up to its final form until the analysis was done since the findings from the research data did imply adjustments to the initial ground-work of the research process.

4.2 Narrative research

4.2.1 Studying narratives

Life stories are fascinating, personal, yet full of universal commonness that goes beyond our individual lives and experiences. Many times these life stories unfold unique chains of events and intertwined bundles of happenings that together create personal narratives of individuals. (Ericksson & Kovalainen 2008; Johansson 2004.) Life narratives told by individuals, at the same time as the heroes or heroines and human agents (Archer 2000) of their own stories, may open up valuable hidden truths about the human reasoning and action in a deeper and more specific manner than any statistically analyzed quantitative data could ever do (Brown 2006; Brown, Stacey & Nandhakumar 2008; Bruner 1990).

Logico-scientific knowledge, meaning scientific knowledge that can be measured and tested with valid and regenerated methods, has traditionally been the kind of knowledge which qualifies as something valid in business research and application and dominating the forms of knowledge in the Western world (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008; Johansson 2004). Yet, it seems that entrepreneurship as well as entrepreneurial behavior, sense-making and even practices do not totally fit into the scheme and goes beyond the generalized research findings. This is where narrative research may start serving as a fine source of filling in the blanks the other methods of research are leaving empty (Bruner 1986; Riessman 1993). Or as a motivation for further studying. Stories may also serve as the shortest way from experience to knowledge and knowledge sharing. (Johansson 2004; Polkinghorne 1988; Riessman 1993.)

The framework of this study thus acknowledges and appreciates something that I shall call 'narrative knowledge' (Polkinhorne 1988). Narrative approach does not have one single angle to enter a subject and systematic methods of analysis often lack due to the disagreement about the definition of a narrative (Riessman 1993). Oral, written texts as well as other language practices construct understanding about the reality; narrative forms of communication serve as means of interpreting, understanding and sharing knowledge (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008; Polkinghorne 1988).

In order to understand different nuances in the literature review and discussion as I try to reveal the feasibility and relevance of narrative approach in business research, it is important to acknowledge that the research literature repeatedly uses the term 'story' and 'narrative' as equivalents (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). There is also a difference in the techniques of analyzing such qualitative data (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008; Polkinghorne 1995).

In this research, I will not focus on making any significant distinction and focusing on spotting the differences between the two terms – story and narrative – but use them as synonyms. Yet, I will have an emphasis on terms comprising 'narrative'. In my research I use narratives according to the distinction worded by Watson (2009: 429):

[A] narrative' will be used as a generic term to refer to accounts of events in the world which are organized in a time-related sequence. 'Story' will refer to narratives which are more highly developed. Stories are temporally sequenced accounts of events which unfold through plots involving the interplay of characters with interests, motives, emotions and moralities.

Commonly, stories are thought as a piece of fiction that narrates a chain of related events, often in a chronological order with a beginning and end (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). Yet, a story may be factual, such as a life story. Be it private and personal or public and widely shared, a story usually describes an entire set of events involving different characters relevant to the process of making sense of it as a whole. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008.) Everyday narratives can be spoken or written accounts of connected events. If considered as an adjective, 'narrative' is about "having the form of a story" (Encyclopædia Britannica 2015). As such, these terms – story and narrative – build up on each other and it is somewhat

irrelevant for this research to continue searching for any major difference in them that has not already been mentioned.

What is important, is that in this research narratives are treated as the “fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite” (Polkinghorne 1988: 13). Thus, significance of events in relation to each other is displayed by the narratives and allows us to understand more of those events and experiences (Polkinghorne 1988).

4.2.2 Narrative as a research method

The inductive approach to the phenomenon will allow me to react on the growing desire to recognize meanings in the research data and possibly gain new understanding on the social and organizational context as well as the reality perceptions of the participants (Saunders et al 2009). A method based on the narrative research strategy allows me to take this path of studying sense-making processes.

In social science research, the rather interpretative narrative approach is justified with the argument that the process of knowing is fundamentally based on producing (telling) and receiving (listening) narratives and needs language as well as a context to serve any function (Bruner 1986; Czarniawska 2004; Polkinghorne 1988). In the context of a narrative an individual interprets life and situational opportunities and limitations through the narrative models given in a cultural stock of narratives (Hänninen 1999). Moreover, people tend to reflect and construct their identity through narratives. (Hänninen 1999; Polkinghorne 1988.)

The narrative approach for the study is reasoned also with the acknowledgement that conducting a contextual and case-based narrative inquiry may give the business research – and especially research on entrepreneurship – its needed depth and perspective (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008; Rae & Carswell 2001; Riessman 2008). Narrative research can in this case serve with its approach to insightful and context-bounded particularities that may be lost in translation with other qualitative methods where categorization and coding eliminating sequential and structural features (Riessman 2008). As a multidisciplinary research approach narrative becomes a means for qualitative inquiry for capturing the complexity of meaning revealed through stories and as a result rich data on the research subjects (Riessman 1993). Roots in the cognitive psychology, this research will be viewing narrative as the reflection or “explanation” of human experience, significance of life events and therefore the cognitive structures (Polkinghorne 1988).

4.3 Research data and narrative inquiry

Collection of the data, transcription and interpretation will be reported here while acknowledging that the stories told are fundamentally falling short of reporting facts but rather memoirs of life events and experiences reflecting the

narrators' mental constructions of them. Additionally, the researcher will surely be unable to report infallible and exact findings and is somewhat in the dark in terms of presenting what was meant to be told. Yet the unique essence of stories will be a great resource in terms of adding to the field of business research and suggesting topics less studied as they reveal more hue to the bigger picture of entrepreneurship. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008; Rae & Carswell 2001; Riessman 1993; Riessman 2008.)

These life stories in this research setting are called as narratives and occasionally the interviewees as narrators. As a baseline, life and career stories of the narrators will include different life events – be it mundane personal life, a point of change, or a particular physical situational dimension of life occurrences – that have become meaningful for the narrator (Hänninen 1999; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008; Riessman 1993). The field of business the interviewees are in is not particularly important but the fact that they are experienced and have a former career – short or extensive – of another kind before taking up the challenge of becoming an entrepreneur. The flow of the narrative will be in focus and thus, the intention is to obtain spoken life stories of the entrepreneurs.

As one characteristic of a narrative research, the plot – the purpose of the research – will be developing throughout the thesis process. Allowing the reader to experience and observe the path from data to the final research report is one part of the narrative research process, leaving also room for silence between the recorded words. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008.) As it has been mentioned that narrative study utilizes subjective experiences and whereas multiple levels of interpretation takes place (Riessman 1993), it is fairly so that “[t]he narrative approach in research of life changes should not be applied as an alternative or as supplementary but a complementary research method” (Hänninen 1999: 73).

4.3.1 Data collection process

Polkinghorne (1988) gives two different approaches researches may take as they go about giving purpose for their study. One purpose for a narrative research may be to describe narratives that are already held by individuals. The other purpose seeks to explain. The explanatory narrative research is conducted to explain why something happened. (Polkinghorne 1988: 161–184.) This research is aiming to gain understanding over the sense-making processes and identity building of internationalized entrepreneurs and how these are interrelated in their life history and career paths. Thus the research is explanatory approaching the focusing question of why and how former professionals have become (international) entrepreneurs and how they have made sense of the chosen career path.

Data and the collection strategy for narrative research material may vary depending on the researcher's choices in relation to the desired approach towards the purpose of the study and the initial research problem. The data collected for this narrative research creates a map of trails expressing past events and experiences. Though narrative research data can be collected from various sources, be it documents or interviews, the extent and variety of the material will

be determined by the kind of ending one wants to describe or explain. (Polkinhorne 1988.) For example in case of explaining a more complex or critical incident which might have occurred because of very technical and detailed course of events, one must collect more supportive material and data than with a simple case in order to fully comprehend what has happened and why. A personal career narrative, such as in this research, may also include less immediate factors which have affected the course of actions and events than does some collectively contextual event within an organization for example.

I saw narrative research as an interesting way of proceeding and approaching such a phenomenon such as the “internationalization” process of an entrepreneur as narratives represent the paths of learning and construction of identity (Johansson 2004; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). It gave me the flexibility, but also the challenge, in terms of going about the output of data as well as the analysis of the data since research questions would inevitably evolve along the way like the stories of the narrators. Since I had not yet conducted a more extensive qualitative research during my own, rather short, career as a researcher, I found it advantageous as I did not have the “burden” of a very experienced qualitative researcher. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008.)

As a researcher I was aware of the fact that a narrative interview wouldn't be the easiest kind. Interviewing without a strict structure, well-formed, content-oriented questions while giving the interviewee the freedom of narration, would probably arise challenges as an interviewer (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). Yet, as a relatively inexperienced researcher I would enjoy the benefit of the narrative interview being free flowing and conversational, more about giving someone a voice rather than interrogating with various questions. This research was therefore based on human narratives that are produced orally and confidentially by the interviewees themselves. The accounts are handled, edited and analyzed so that none of the personal stories can be identified or traced to the origin.

The interviews were held and recorded in places that the interviewees themselves had chosen, usually either their own offices or the like. Giving the interviewees the freedom of choosing the place, I tried to minimize the feeling of externality and uneasiness of the participants in the interview setting. It would also reduce the possible outside noises, interruptions or walk-ins to the minimum. From the beginning, I wished to create a light and relaxed atmosphere that would enable trust and confidentiality and by highlighting my sensitivity to their personal stories but also the time they could spend on the interview. Thus, I did not take the privacy matter for granted but also communicated it to the participants. The notion that we were going on the terms of the narrators themselves, not the researcher/listener, was one of my desires as I communicated with the participants.

Since this narrative research was based on personal narratives, personal experiences were highly valued and wanted. From the start I communicated my desire to hear the research subjects' own experiences and subjective accounts, rather than a clean company story. Participants were repeatedly encouraged to tell their accounts with their own words and as detailed as they wanted to, based on their current memory. In the beginning of the interviews I placed a very broad

question on the interviewee's life and let them tell what had taken them to the place where they were at that moment. I would communicate as well as I possibly could that I wouldn't expect them to know what to say or tell throughout the whole interview, but that I would be helping them with questions rising from their account. This way I wished to keep the interview as conversational as possible, without interrogating or governing the interview with my own agenda. This kind of approach to the narrative interviewing produced four totally unique and original interviews distinct from each other not only in terms of the content of the stories, but also the structure of the interviews themselves.

As an argument for narrative approach for this study, it is suggested that narrative interviews hold back from interrupting the flow of interviewees account. Here, structured interviews with pre-set questions and moderation may have initially destroyed any valuable storyline that may better take form within an agenda-free interview setting. While structured interviews are more in service for interpretation and generalization purposes, narrative approach takes also into account the sequential and structural aspects of the accounts. (Riessman 1993.)

Though some thematic questions were prepared beforehand to ease my own work as an interviewer in case there were unexpected silence and lack of discussion, none of the cases demanded me to fully resort to my own agenda. Instead I could heavily rely on the participants' abilities to generate data on their own and I could just make the needed elaborative questions that rose from the narrative accounts themselves. Some of the topics emerging from the interviewees own speech were related to my prepared thematic questions and thus would give me the chance to ask questions for more elaborative account of those specific topics.

In addition to the main question placed in the beginning of the interview ("how did you become an international entrepreneur?") I asked in various ways about international orientation (e.g. "what does being international mean to you?"), entrepreneurship (e.g. "tell me about yourself as an entrepreneur?") and leadership (e.g. "what kind of leader are you?") or the past in general (e.g. "what did you dream of when you were a young?") and personal change (e.g. "how have you changed during your career?").

As an inexperienced researcher, in some interview moments I would make the mistake of asking somewhat suggestive questions. For example in one interview as the interviewee told me about trust issues in entrepreneurship in general, I asked to elaborate it in the international context, yet added unnecessarily to the end "is the trust easy to obtain?" Though, in the moment it didn't come out as out of line but actually generated more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer: a whole story of a business encounter unfolded and thus generated deeper content than expected with such question. Suggestive questions would decrease in number as I got more confident as an interviewer and noticed the stumbling along the way.

Additionally, I noticed during the interviews as well as when listening to the recordings that I many times dreaded the silence, though I knew it would only do well for the interviewee if I kept my mouth shut. The ability to keep myself calm, silent and from rushing the speaker to go on would have been more precious than gold when listening to a life narrative. It is often that silence gives

the needed time to elaborate on things that are significant to the story and provokes the narrator to recall memories (Fraser 2004). Though some themes and paths that the interviews took did in the immediate moment seem less relevant to the research problem, I wouldn't dare to alter the course of the accounts. As I intentionally left the initial interview questions optional and less formal, I anticipated a free-flowing and untouched narrative process richer in content, governed by the interviewee.

I interviewed four individuals in total, all of them Finnish citizens. Each participant was hand-picked with the criteria of being an entrepreneur that has founded or co-founded a company, and has run a business at least for 5 years in total. Additionally, the entrepreneur was to have taken the company into the international market. The participants were acquired from as different fields of business as possible, yet originally established their company within the borders of Finland. Moreover, the companies were to represent both knowledge intensive as well as manufacturing business. This was to bring a wanted variety and differentiation in backgrounds in terms of e.g. education and career paths taken by the subjects.

The table below lists the participants and some guiding industry information along with an outline of the interview specifications (Table 1). Names were changed for anonymous reporting. The names used here are for the purpose of creating a better flow when reading the analysis part.

Interviewee	Date of the interview	Duration of the interview	Pages of transcribed text	Industry of the interviewees company	Title/position	International locations
"Jake"	28.9.2015	1 h 5 m 49 s	15	Technology / manufacturing	CEO, founder	EU, US, MEA
"Kate"	1.10.2015	1 h 24 m 28 s	19	Software for management processes	CEO, founder	EU, US
"Mark"	12.10.2015	1 h 17 m 27 s	12	Software for manufacturing companies	CMO, co-founder	EU
"Paul"	23.10.2015	1 h 21 m 33 s	14	Management consulting	Senior partner, co-founder	EU

Table 1 Interviews and the interviewees

The participants for the research were found and contacted with the help of personal contacts of the researcher. Two of the interviewees were found through a contact at a previous employment, one through a contact who shared membership in a business organization and one directly at an industry business fair. The first three were contacted by email, yet the first two originally by a third party, a

colleague, for initial reference. The idea of referring to a common denominator was found very effective in terms of gaining initial trust and visibility as the emails were sent. One can truly feel short of ideas in gaining access to participants by simple email requests. The stream of emails of high caliber people is never-ending and creates an obstacle between the researcher and the research subject if there are no means of getting through more personally.

I entered the interview settings with a relatively open mind, didn't want to intentionally lead the interview and started to analyze the data without a too biased perception of how it should be done. Many times it may be that prior hypotheses or propositions stray the researcher's mind towards a formerly adopted way of thinking or approach. Additionally, a researcher conducting a narrative research must be aware of certain issues related to transcribing and analyzing human experience as a data, since one is never fully objective and detached from one's own understanding and socially constructed perspectives. (Riessman 1993: 11-14.) Next I will be describing the approach I took to analyze the data. I bring forth my own presence and agency along the analysis process in order to validate it, acknowledging that researcher participation and likely inabilities in absolute accuracy will affect the process.

4.3.2 Analyzing narrative material

As stated earlier many times, the present research was primarily conducted to gain deeper understanding on human experience and explore the sense-making process over one's personal career and life story, and thus I am interested in analyzing the personal narratives as means of sense-making. As the narratives were analyzed as social phenomena, they were to be viewed as forms of social action (Atkinson & Delamont 2006) not simply and solely as unaltered representation of reality and individual constructions (Somers 1994). Yet, regardless of the certain features of the data produced within the one-on-one interviews, these accounts were viewed as personal narratives of interviewees whereas the interviewer's role was only to facilitate the non-directive interview.

My intention was to give these international entrepreneurs a voice of their own as they tell their experiences and of their career choices. Such perspective imply that the narrative is rather an approach and that has roots in axiological choices (Robert & Shenhav 2014). By this I mean that my research, on one hand, serves as an alternative channel through which the participants may communicate their stories as they unfold. On the other hand, through the analysis of the narratives, this adds to the micro-level knowledge of scientific research and findings of experts via other research approaches. Such axiological perspective though does not mean that by communicating stories of ordinary people would go through as unquestionable, factual and truly authentic accounts (Atkinson & Delamont 2006). Additionally, one must indeed realize the aspects of the narratives also "in terms of their rhetorical, persuasive properties, and their functions in constructing particular versions of events, justifications of actions, evaluations of others, and so on" (Atkinson & Delamont 2006; 167).

Analyzing narrative research data has no one universal way of doing it and just like there is no one typical or “right” way to become an international entrepreneur (Mitchell 1997), there is not only one best method to approach the narratives and analysis of them (Mishler 1995; Riessman 2005). The processes suggested for analyzing narratives are mainly frameworks that help researchers to navigate through the ocean of different perspectives. As I went through the possibilities of how to analyze my research data, I educated myself with Robert & Shenhav’s (2014) classification of certain assumptions that should be considered when analyzing narratives and different phases (Fraser 2004) that may help researchers to approach their multisided and rather thick narrative material.

The first assumption consideration is the status of narrative. Narrative can be viewed as the fabric of human existence, meaning that it is through stories that social identities are constituted (Somers 1994; 606). Though, stories tell us about the real experiences and event, they cannot be considered as self-explanatory but as accounts or reflections that need interpretation (Riessman 2005). Narratives are thus “representational devices” (Robert & Shenhav 2014), ways of representing experience, communicating information and messages, but also producing identity, meaning and ideas. Thus, the emphasis is on mainly on the content and on what is said rather than, with a discursive approach, on how it is said. Language is considered “a resource” and thus the focus is on the meaning of those produced words. This leads me towards the thematic analysis, found typical to case-based studies such as my own. (Riessman 2005.)

Here I want to note, that by strictly focusing on thematic appearances in the data, and weighing all the importance on the meaning of what is actually said, one may suffer from a biased view on the data and analysis. As every researcher has their own theoretical perspectives and interests, they would therefore benefit from taking into consideration other types of approaches to the analysis. An incorporation or overlapping of different types of analysis may give the view onto the data from various perspectives. (Riessman 2005.)

Though, the interest of this research is primarily in the content, my analysis process of the narratives must take into consideration some of the structural elements of those accounts as well. As does none of the narrative analysis approaches, thematic analysis does not exclude entirely the possibilities to analyze narrative accounts structurally. Such approach to the narrative material is actually useful in case-studies for its detailed nature taking into account the smaller nuances of talk and representation. (Riessman 2005.) Still, one must remember that the main focus of structural analysis is different, having emphasis more on the features of talk and the way one tells a story and “communicative work it accomplishes” (Riessman 2005; 3). The Labovian approach examine the basic structural components found in a narrative account (Labov 1982): the abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda. These elements may occur in different sequences and while some accounts has clearly all of them, many narrative accounts will lack some of the elements.

Although the interview setting was to be non-directive and contain as little guidance as possible, I will be reporting the interactional analysis of the data as well. If there is two people in a room having a conversation, there will surely be

interaction of some sort. Interaction can be verbal or non-verbal and contain various kinds of communication between the two consciously as well as unconsciously. Such interaction between a participant (narrator) and an interviewer (listener) may not be heard or otherwise detected from the audio-recording afterwards and therefore, the memory and interpretation of the researcher are factors making a non-videoed interview setting fragile for gaps. In this research such interactional elements were taken into account, though, the analysis is not dominated by them. The co-creational aspect of some narratives in the interviews were analyzed and reported provided that it was relevant and topical to the research objectives and questions. Such aspects of the interview and transcript analysis could be for instance interruptions or over-talk, pauses, slightly suggestive questions as well as changing of topic. (Riessman 2005.)

Another assumption to consider, is that the analysis process touches upon the perspective on a narrative itself. The limitation of narrative research is many times the focus on language, excluding much of the material expressions such as art or other means of communication that are not solely spoken words (Schiff 2007). Despite the limitation, the perspective on narrative of this research is on the accounts of the participants and moreover the unstructured form of narrative. Many times stories unfold in fragmented manner creating a colorful material of small pieces of experience that need interpretation for the sake of the bigger picture. (Boje 2001; Robert & Shenhav 2014.)

As I approached the analysis of my data I made the distinction between two types of analysis processes typically taken in narrative research. Since these two processes look at the data as well as the whole reporting from a different angle I wish to make a distinction between them. See Figure 3 for a visualization of the two processes 'narrative analysis' and 'analysis of narratives' (Polkinghorne 1995).

The process of 'narrative analysis' refers to a technique in which a researcher, after collecting the empirical data, interprets events and actions by constructing one or multiple narratives which are then interpreted and discussed (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Unlike in narrative analysis where the narrative is the mode of analysis, in the analysis of narratives a researcher analyses the plots, structure or story types of the stories told by people by using a chosen technique. Focus on the narratives guides the process to explore themes of event, situations, characteristics etc. (Polkinghorne 1988.) Narratives represent as the accounts of events occurring over time and the quality which defines the narratives is the unique pattern those events create (Bruner, 1991).

In this thesis I approached the data with the latter type of analysis process, the analysis of narrative, since the interest is in narratives being the way of representing experience, identity and meaning (Robert & Shenhav 2014). I realize that the limitation of this research is the shortage of stories, when there was only four participants giving their account, yet I believe that a line-by-line analysis of their narratives enables an in-depth analysis of each (Fraser 2004). Also, with my perspective on narrative, acknowledging the small and fragmented pieces of experience, I conclude that seemingly concise data can generate much more meaning and knowledge than first appears possible.

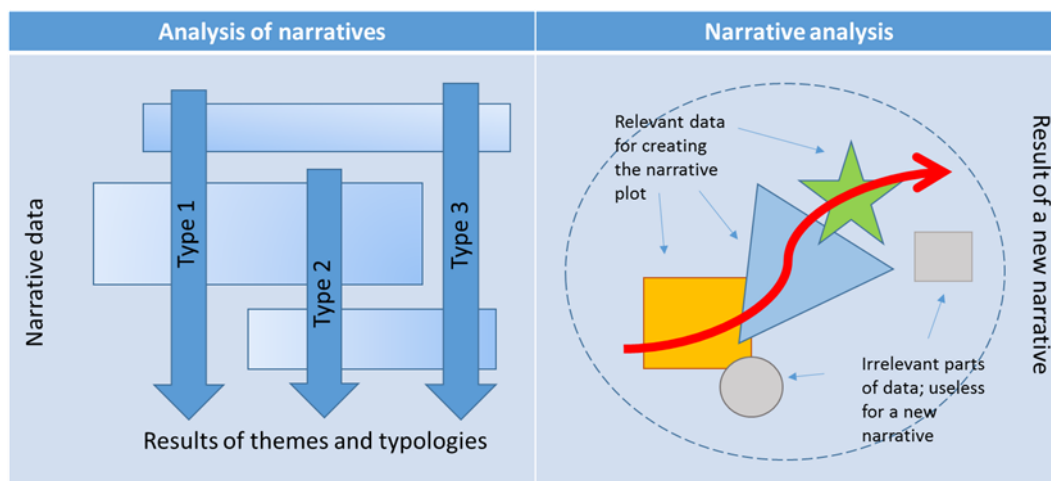


Figure 3 Types of analysis process

In order to make sense of my own data analysis process even more, I approached it in certain phases. Casting a general outline of the thought process, the phases included (1) the analysis of the interview situations and the process of transcription, (2) the analysis of the individual accounts and scanning of different domains of experiences, (3) the exploration of commonalities and differences among accounts of different participants and lastly (4) the analysis of my own reporting about personal narratives (application of Fraser 2004).

The main broader idea was the categorization of the narratives of the participants into certain thematic story types (Braun & Clark 2006). This approach would highlight the events and chapters of life that have formed these narrators into certain kind of international entrepreneurs and the kind of plots and themes the entrepreneurs create for their story. (Hänninen 1999; Mykkänen 2010.) While it is important to see the process rather than the conclusion of the story, the analysis will be accenting what the entrepreneurs are telling – be it experiences, intentions and reasoning or the meaning of them (Mykkänen 2010).

The transcription process

I made the transcriptions of the audio recordings by myself, word-by-word. The interviews were done in Finnish since all of the interviewees were Finnish citizens with Finnish as their mother tongue. Yet, for the purposes of this report I have then translated the relevant quotes into English.

Though, I knew everything in the interview setting would be recorded and saved, I took additional notes of accounts I thought might later on become interesting to take closer look at. Transcribing was done approximately two months after the interviews due to more acute work and study responsibilities, and since I wanted to concentrate on them all at the same time. I knew some disadvantage would occur with the delayed transcription, such as forgetting some emotional or social interaction aspects of the interview settings, but I had little choice to do it in another way.

First, I transcribed everything heard on the audiotape, including the utterances such as “umm” or “mm-hmm” affirming speech or an expression of thinking. In this first round of transcription, I also made notes on certain expressions of emotion or opinion, such as laugh, interruptions, tone of voice, though the interest was in the verbal accounts, not so much on the non-verbal communication. Yet, if I did feel the need to include and mark down the emotional climate in the transcription, I did so.

In the second round of transcribing, I cleaned the first transcripts and put them into the form of more formal language, using full length words and correct grammar. This I did for the sake of having a clearer view on the narrative the interviewees were trying to tell. After this round of transcription, I had altogether 60 pages of text.

Primary “censorship” and exclusion of some expressions were made by gut feelings, but rather overly reporting any possibly meaningful expression than not. For example, I quickly took note on some of the ways the accounts were colored by humor and some self-irony. Some of the interviewees did also provoke and respond to somewhat irrelevant comments, which made the interview settings more relaxed and open for possible bursting of more meaningful side stories:

“But I doubt that I’ve always been like this. I was probably quite a jerk when I was younger.”

“...when we established our company --- we had kind of complementary strengths. At least in my case. They would’ve probably survived without me, but I wouldn’t have!”

As an interviewer I would try to keep myself from making questions that would lead the conversation too much, yet I would pick up themes or notions and ask for elaboration or whether I had understood some accounts correctly. If I made a quick interruption or a comment between sentences I transcribed those, in order to follow their possible affect and have a clear knowledge of where I could’ve lead the account without purpose. At times, I suggested sort of a short summary for the interviewees of what they had just said or simply made sure I had understood them correctly and giving alternative words for the account. For example, when one of the interviewees tried to explain the thought process emerging over time when thinking of and making the final decision of becoming an entrepreneur:

Interviewee: “--- I don’t know how to explain it more precisely. It has been in mind every once in a while and when an opportunity like this comes along, so ‘why not now?’”

Satu: “Right. Did you think... do I hear it correctly that you sort of have had... that it has, so to speak, raised its head every now and then?”

Interviewee: “Yes, exactly.”

As I went through the transcripts over and over, I would first try to detect the structures and narratives the interviewees where telling. Certain themes would

emerge and I'd give them general meanings in terms of personal and social dimensions of what the entrepreneurs told me. Soon I would start developing an idea of different types of international entrepreneurs based on their overall path into entrepreneurship.

Experiences have multiple layers such as the dimensions of attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing and, finally, reading the narrative (Riessman 1993). As an international entrepreneur, one had attended and, now, told the narrative which I have then transcribed. Transcription itself is already a part of the analysis, yet the analyzing the narrative started fully as I extracted interesting citations and lines, that communicated what it meant to be an international entrepreneur, what had made one take the journey in the first place and what had influenced the process of becoming what one was now.

Ideas, opinions and plots of stories were divided (Fraser 2004) and reorganized into junks of citations as the analysis process went further. This I did in order to categorize themes, but also for the purposes of drawing a timeline of experiences and the "epiphany" of certain ideas or identity aspects. Reorganizing text in order to follow a journey of 'what kind of experience and insights were made at what point' made it easier to see connections between dimensions of environment, action and internal (or mental) processes. This also made me more sensitive to certain agenda the interviewees may be trying to "drive home".

Contributing to the analysis with a time line, or a chronological story line of the interview accounts, made it also possible to look for certain commonalities between the stories. Exploring similarities between construction of the substance, entrepreneurship, work and international identities of the international entrepreneurs became possible also cross-person not only within the distinct story lines.

4.4 Rigour of qualitative research

As the purpose of a qualitative study, such as the present one, is found in the goal of generating deeper understanding, the value and reliability of the research is found in the way and method the understanding is tried to be reached. Why have I followed a certain path and what kind of (ethical and practical) decisions it has consisted of? A good qualitative study helps one to uncover and understand a phenomenon or a situation that otherwise could remain rather confusing and cryptic. (Stenbacka 2001; Eisner 1991.) In this research, I consider the rigour (or thoroughness) of the work as the foundation and source of the reliability and trustworthiness of my master's thesis.

Consistency and care of applying certain practices and ethical considerations are in the core of qualitative and especially narrative research. Hence, it is relevant to elaborate those consideration a little for a moment. I build up the meaning of rigour on a certain cluster of terms opened up by Davies and Dodd (2002). Rigour of this research is brought to the reader by stressing elements such as attentiveness, empathy, carefulness, sensitivity, respect, reflection, conscien-

tiousness, engagement, awareness and openness throughout the study of the personal narratives. Especially in the data collection and analysis process. The consideration of the elements of a rigorous research process are visible especially in the reporting of issues on subjectivity, reflexivity and social interaction of the interviews.

Ethical principles form the backbone of a qualitative research and should remain as the integral part the whole research process (Davies & Dodd 2002). If something cannot be accounted or reported without manipulation of truth, one has already started to lose ethical groundings of the whole process. The research process itself has to remain transparent for both researcher and the reader. Careful, truthful and systematic reporting of the researcher's "voice" of thoughts, reflections and insights of any challenges or possible contradictions has to be well represented if they are found relevant to the process of understanding the phenomenon. Such transparency, the "acknowledgment and location of the researcher" (Davies & Dodd 2002, p. 281), contributes to the ethical practices of this research. Making the research process conscious for oneself and others is crucial in order to remain accountable and open in concluding the study, acknowledging possible preconceptions steering any parts of the interpretation and analysis process. (Davies & Dodd 2002; Stenbacka 2001.)

The issue of subjectivity in qualitative research refers to the challenge of remaining objective and unbiased throughout the research process, from the beginning to the end. Yet, it is acknowledged widely in social sciences that absolute objectivity in both quantitative and qualitative research is impossible (Davies & Dodd 2002) and a researcher is always prone to their own pre-understandings when doing research (Stenbacka 2001). Knowledge is never free from values and attitudes but one can identify their presence by paying attention to responsibility, accountability, partiality and subjectivity throughout the process (Davies & Dodd 2002).

To avoid the pitfalls of drawing my own presumptions and pre-knowledge into the analysis and, moreover, interpretations as much as possible, I have tried to reflect my own decision making, be it rational or irrational, in the research plan, method or process of analysis and open up any biased hopes and theoretical presumptions for critique (Davies & Dodd 2002). Hence, reflection and reflexivity will serve as a relatively powerful tool in steering the research into directions where it wants to go, despite the presumed research objectives. Therefore,

[r]eflexivity is not simply a change in research plan as a reaction to poor test results or ambiguous findings; rather, it involves a reflective self-examination of our own ideas and an open discussion and comparison of our research experiences. (Davies & Dodd 2002, p. 286.)

Many times, such reflexivity issues arise in research due to the in-depth interviews like my own. The narrative approach to the data collection was "doomed" to generate research material causing challenges in making sense of the rich, unorganized and contextual data of experiences and personal lives. If the partici-

pants are encouraged to tell in their own way how they personally felt, experienced or found meaning, one can be sure the data is going off any borders one may want to set in advance (Davies & Dodd 2002).

Narrative interviewing with social interaction creates the time, space and context for shared communication and generates two-way traffic of information. (Davies & Dodd 2002.) In other words, reflections on 'how my presence and interaction with the interviewee may have affected the data collection process?' Also, the context and sequence in which an interview is given affects the generation of narrative data (Polkinghorne 1988).

As stated before, the interview process raised certain issues I became aware of along the research process. The first was the help I gave the interviewees by asking leading "yes or no" questions in order for them to be more elaborate on certain issues. Such directive parts of the data therefore are handled with extra care in order to make as little fast assumptions as possible. Secondly, it became impossible to follow any set question structure in the interview due to the unique paths the interviews took when telling their stories. I noticed certain themes popping up an interview after an interview, yet I sensed my role as "the listener" to be largely intuitive, following any interesting topics emerging without any conscious desire to direct the conversation too much.

In this narrative research, the significance is found in the importance of a finding (Polkinghorne 1988). With that note, I guide you to my findings keeping in mind that the interviewees were primarily asked to tell in their own words their story on how they became international entrepreneurs. The interest is found in the meaning and sense they make of their path into international entrepreneurship and what is meaningful in their own experience. Therefore, if it is important to the international entrepreneur, it is significant.

5 MAKING SENSE OF INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP NARRATIVES

This chapter presents the analysis of the data. The chapter includes the findings of the analysis; the self-narratives are opened up in the light of the research problem. My general focus question is why and how former professionals become international entrepreneurs and moreover, how do they make sense of their career paths. First, I try to answer the research questions about what is international entrepreneurship and about sense-making processes building up the identity of an international entrepreneur. Secondly, the chapter 6 constructs the narratives into chronological sequences of events in order to typify the international entrepreneurs' narrative identities in relation to situational sense-making processes case by case.

The data represents stories from real life and unfolds experiences about mundane and situational events. Constructing their own reality, the interviewees tell their experiences of points in time or wider periodic wholes that represent larger chunks of lived life in a certain environment. As such, these entrepreneurs are therefore experiencing series of interactional events, varying in "volume, velocity and volatility" (Morris et al 2012). This means that none of the narratives can be treated or understood exactly the same way, put into order of significance or treated truly objectively without interpretations of individual, social, situational or even political dimensions and connotations.

5.1 Narrative structures within the data

At this point I may give a general overview of understanding some basics of the overall structures of the stories emerging in the data. Understanding the simplified structures of these narratives serves only as a base for the further analysis process and isn't reported as such later on. The sense-making process of the narratives are in the focus, thus the analysis of the structures primarily served only as means of locating and collecting significant events and meanings of them

within the interviewees' accounts. Such events and circumstances construct identity (McAdams 2013; Polkinghorne 1988) and are therefore important to locate within junks of a complex narrative material. Identity may for example be located in narratives where the 'self' is being explained or presented through "I am" (Schwartz et al 2011).

Many of the narratives representing an event or experience were extremely short, only one or two sentences. The one below gives an example. It is a miniature story about the entrepreneur's "double role" of being both entrepreneur and inventor:

"Last weekend I was an inventor. The whole weekend I was putting together a new product for a customer. The good old propeller head woke up again."

Labov (1982) extracts the different constructs of a narrative in order to analyze them structurally. According to him, usually before the actual body of narrative, the narrative has an abstract summarizing it and sometimes indicating the point of the narrative. In the example, the possible point was that this entrepreneur would sometimes consider himself as an inventor over the entrepreneur in him: "Last weekend I was an inventor" and could be followed by a note "but now I'm an entrepreneur again". There can also be found a construct of an orientation in a narrative, indicating the time, place, characters and situation. Orientation of the example narrative is presented as "last weekend", "I" and "a customer".

Complicating action in a narrative gives out the imagined plot of the narrative, sometimes a crisis or a turning point within the narrative (Labov 1982). The event sequence of the example narrative is thus the (1) impact by the request of a customer (2) waking up of the propeller head, which is (3) followed by the need to work on a custom product a whole weekend.

Yet, such a short narrative does not include all of the structural elements a narrative may have. A narrative may have an evaluation dimension, in which the narrator exits the action in order to comment on a meaning or communicate emotion. Such commenting usually gives the "soul" of the narrative. (Labov 1982) An example can be given through another example, a comment one of the interviewees makes in the middle of a story about a mismatched position of employment he had had in the past, giving meaning onto how it occurred and why:

"We somehow charmed each other within the recruitment process... or that's how I've perceived it afterwards."

Resolution is also one of the main constructs of a narrative, communicating the outcome of the event sequence or plot. The resolution may then be followed by a coda that ends the narrative by bringing the action back to the present moment. (Labov 1982.) Such coda could have been the imaginary notion "but now I'm an entrepreneur again" mentioned above when discussing the abstract.

Loads of the narratives analyzed in this research were rather short and built around themes that were emerging from the discussion. Many times the events accounted were not represented in a chronological order, but the interviewees would go back and forth between themes, events, contexts and subjects. Yet, this

would make no difference as I would go about investigating and analyzing the sense-making processes of the IEs. However, for the interest of understanding better the paths of becoming an international entrepreneur, I additionally re-organized the data into chronological storylines presented, typifying the narrative identities.

The narratives about becoming international entrepreneur or simply an entrepreneur would follow many times the structure of a narrative with the Labovian constructs. Often the accounts would describe the present environment, context and on-going action, but was then followed by a narrative presented in past tense giving examples of events highlighting what the interviewee wanted to say. Experiences that I analyzed were generally speaking something that had happened or occurred in the past, stories that were clearly in the past tense, including an ending resolution or a coda bringing the action back to present. Otherwise, something taking place currently in the business was assumed to have no resolution yet or a specific ending, not to speak of a coda that would shift the tense from past to present. If on-going and currently occurring experiences are analyzed, it is clearly stated and reasoned along the process.

Citations of interviewees' narratives, in this analysis, may seem rather lengthy in relation to what is normally seen in qualitative research analysis reporting. Many times it occurs that only the critical parts are cited, leaving much of the speech "uncited". The occasional lengthiness of the citations, though, is justified with the need to present some particular narrative structure or a relevant construct reflected through a longer storyline in speech. Such structures or constructs of thought may remain unnoticed or would not become visible without such a representation in writing.

5.2 Discovering international entrepreneurship

5.2.1 Reasons behind becoming an international entrepreneur

As mentioned earlier, former research has tried to understand more of whether entrepreneurship is the result of external environmental factors or more of a result of human agency (Shane et al 2003; Dawson & Henley 2012). Additionally, we have stated in this thesis that many times there are certain push and pull factors of going international in the organizational and firm level (Etemad 2004; Mejri & Umemoto 2010). In order to fill in a research gap, this research was interested in gaining more understanding of the reasons for international entrepreneurship, tapping on the sense-making processes of becoming an international entrepreneur.

The data shows two kinds of reasoning approaches, why one has chosen international entrepreneurship. As a result, the reasoning for becoming an international entrepreneur are here divided to two categories: internal push and external pull. Those two are given two different subcategories, the more specific paths the entrepreneurs of this research have taken. Internal push is divided into

a personal desire to do international business and the desire to utilize knowledge substance. The external pull is divided into the global change (such as digitalization) and a specific “market pain”. (Figure 4)

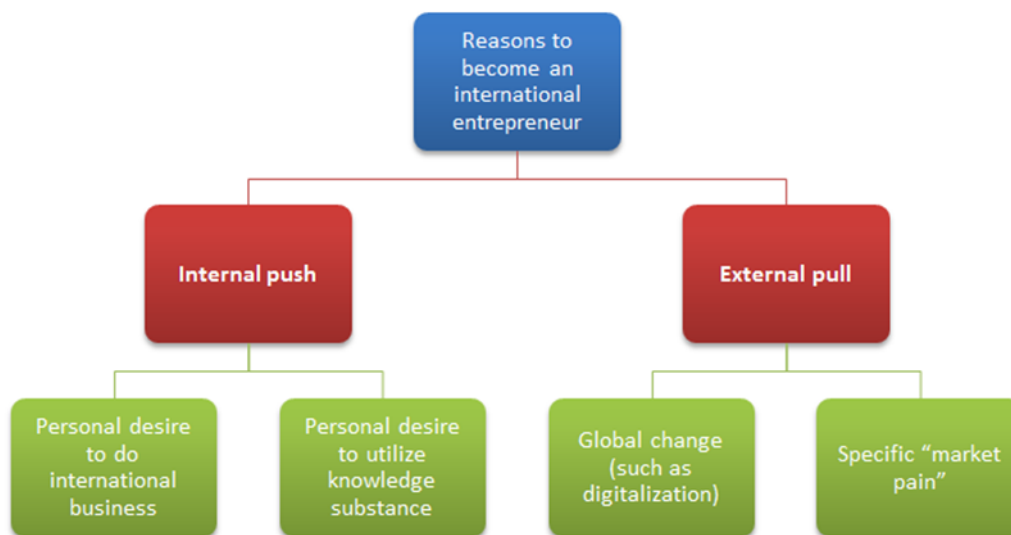


Figure 4 Reasons to become an international entrepreneur

These sense-making processes into international entrepreneurship were many times overlapping and linked to each other in the narrative accounts. Thus, it was possible to see combinations of these categories. Also, the weighing value of an initial factor affecting the reasoning process would possibly change due to other factors. For example, if one first had an internal push, desire, dominating sense-making towards a certain action utilizing knowledge substance of a specific field, it could be that the external pull would affect the sense-making later on.

The internal push factor

Many times it seemed that internal factors, in other words the internal push, weighed more in the beginning, whereas the later phases of the process of becoming an international entrepreneur were guided by external pull factors. The concept of internal push in this case means a personal desire to do something. It was detected in the speech of the interviewee and the narratives they tell. Such desire was reflected in either a direct or an indirect manner. Kate was rather direct with her desire to do what she was doing at the moment. This quote excludes the international aspect, yet it was mentioned later on more indirectly:

Kate: “Of this [knowledge] substance, and I try to get it into helpful use. Those books have been that, I wanted to create a tool for the substance and would outlive in the future... It would bring added value and benefit the user, in these companies... and it is, like, what I want to give, and the feedback of giving is like the driver. The motive. - --”

Paul on the other hand narrated about his corporate life and the international business he had been doing almost all his career. His narratives reflecting multicultural encounters in the international business field were numerous and many

times they weren't pretty. Yet, he had grown a deep interest along his career from the first international assignments all the way to the business he was doing at the moment:

Paul: "From the first employment onwards has this kind of international aspect been part of my job. --- And then I saw a Finnish company was looking for a candidate to go to Canada... and I sought for the position, or applied and got hired. --- First one ends up into international tasks, then it feels natural, and then one seeks into such."

Later on I asked Paul if any of his experiences had made him doubt about continuing doing international business:

Paul: "No, vice versa, vice versa. I think about it [internationalization] all day long. --- What comes to international... like exporting etc. --- Someone once told me that 'please come down, Paul'. So it is like, if I get excited about something, it is this [enhancing international business]."

In addition to the exploration of what made sense in relation to becoming an international entrepreneur, I noticed that the overall reasons of becoming an entrepreneur were more or less by personal preference and choice. These entrepreneurs did not give accounts of certain financial necessities, such as unemployment, as reasons to become an entrepreneur, but rather the internal desire to pursue a career as self-employed. These entrepreneurs carried a vision, which was more or less reflected in their narratives. One of the entrepreneurs even "confesses" that he had not been up to making the "big bucks", but rather enjoyed his normal everyday life:

Jake: "I have never gone after some huge fortune or millions..."

In this sense, my data can surely be questioned and considered as short of diversity among entrepreneurs there are in this world or even in Finland. It has been noted that at times of unemployment, many people choose entrepreneurship because of a need for employment. Yet, to defend the lack of such perspective to entrepreneurship, my interest is in the international entrepreneurship, not so much of the initial reasons to become an entrepreneur. With a simple conclusion, it might actually be that those entrepreneurs that have had the need (financial, family or other reasons) to become an entrepreneur may not be capable of thinking about international business just yet.

The external pull factor

The external pull means the outside "forces" or factors that made sense to these entrepreneurs to consider entrepreneurship and the international aspect of their business. The other of the main factors was the discovery of an opportunity, the "market pain" that the entrepreneur wanted to meet and "heal".

After a period of inventing alongside with other work in an international company, Jake came up with a product that would save international clients' money. He had been talking with the clients and had noticed there was a real need for his invention. Such "market pain" creates a concrete reason to start doing international business since the customers are spread across the globe. Many

times the business determines the nature of the entry modes and other operational decisions, but the need is there and one cannot choose whether or not go international.

The other external pull factor was the global change, digitalization being one of the most evident in my data. Mark emphasized the role of digitalization in his business. His background being in a bilingual and multicultural family, it was given that he was international. Yet, he had noticed that the nature of the business environment today demanded international orientation, at least to some extent. Digitalization and other technological development have been changing the game of modern business and international entrepreneurship, whereas internet (Reuber & Fischer 2011) and later on the mobile technology changed the business world entirely some decades ago (Andersson 2011; Toma et al 2014).

At the end, these entrepreneurs had all made a rather clear, logical choice to become an international entrepreneur that made sense to them personally. Though, the point of inception for international business varied in relation to their career development, the intellectual processes of making the entrepreneurial decision was rather straight forward and clear in their narratives as they reflected on the reasons to become an entrepreneur.

5.2.2 What makes an international entrepreneur?

The desire to become an entrepreneur was detected through certain accounts given by the interviewees. These desires follow somewhat the reasoning mentioned above: internal push and external pull factors. To give an example of an internal push, I give you Jake's and Paul's accounts of their share of corporate life. They were prone to autonomy and to do things as they saw suitable. Paul got to taste the negative side of being not quite in the position to make a critical change in a business. Yet, in the long run, the whole event ended up being a good thing, since he ended up not investing into a risky business. This was before he founded his current company and was still working for someone:

Paul: "This company I had been a managing director in before, I did think about buying it. I mean, then when it was in trouble, but we couldn't come into an agreement, as the owner was... Well, I can't criticize him in that way... and there's no reason either, but I think he was lacking the desire to make changes. I thought, 'if this was my firm completely, those changes would be made no doubt'. And it was as settled, actualizing, but then it became watered down because one of the investors wouldn't agree to put it into practice. But yea... There I would've taken such a risk, that I would regret it now. I think."

Jake was tired of being held back with his visions of better products and services:

Jake: "And then, when you work for someone else, you can, like, sense it in yourself, that this kind of person cannot feel truly content in someone else's service. Since you want to do more and sometimes you want to do things as good as possible, and then you have all the time those fences in front of you. Like, 'no, you can't do this or that', someone doesn't let you execute it, so it kind of... very often you feel like 'why the hell do you do this?'"

All the accounts reflect similar attitudes towards the desire to keep things moving, work hard and use of their own substance knowledge for someone's benefit. A closer look into the certain process of identity building, both international identity and entrepreneurial identity, will be taken later on in this chapter. The exploration of dimensions of identity construction will then be followed by the introduction of the storylines of the interviewees (see Chapter 5 and Appendix 1).

Though the stories report similarities of certain factors in reasoning of becoming an international entrepreneur, variation is found in the deeper, individual level. Those levels communicate the unique passions and desires these entrepreneurs felt towards self-employment and "doing their own thing" when establishing their international businesses. One of the entrepreneurs, Mark, had dreams and was sure from the beginning of his career that he was going to be an entrepreneur:

Mark: "At the end of my studies, I stayed working at the university. I had already decided that I, umm... I'd become an entrepreneur. I announced to them, when they asked me to stay work for them, I said, I will never pursue an academic career. I said, great if I can have my doctoral degree at some point, but I will not pursue an academic career, I want to be an entrepreneur."

His vision was clear, he had the desire to become an entrepreneur utilizing the knowledge he had at that point. Due to other factors, there was some time between acknowledging the desire to become a full-time entrepreneur and the possibility to actually do so.

Paul, on the other hand, found his real desire to become an entrepreneur through more various events and at a much later stage of his career. The desire was to utilize what he knew, but couldn't right away figure out how:

Paul: "I remember thinking earlier that what it could be, entrepreneurship... and then, when umm... this previous employment had ended that... or it didn't end that way... I had several months when I still got paid and I could dream about whatever I wanted, it probably helped a little... But I did research on many (business opportunities) back then..."

Jake's journey into doing what he does now started when he realized he wanted to quit university and start working instead. He had found "his thing" in a certain field of business:

Jake: "I never graduated, I was swept away by work and I realized that [this field of business] was my thing."

But just like Mark, Jake had to wait to enact on the entrepreneurial opportunity that really hit the nerve of a market pain. It wasn't until the current business opportunity emerged after about 20 years, when Jake took upon the actions of becoming a fulltime international entrepreneur.

Mark's journey had included entrepreneurial efforts some time before setting up his current business in which he had invested his knowledge of the substance:

Mark: "From that I probably got the first touch of what it feels like when you create something on your own. That was perhaps the first experience on entrepreneurship and you have created something yourself... --- At the time of studies, these experiences, like establishing the (sports) team, and some things that we went through in some courses, about establishing a firm was one of those courses, one were you actually create your own business idea and gather substance around it... --- But it was actually the substance (the understanding of a method and service tool) through which I ended up being an (full-time) entrepreneur eventually."

Kate, on the other hand, wanted to put her knowledge into use and created her business around the substance knowledge she had gained throughout the years along her corporate career. The process of constructing a substance knowledge included consulting, writing books and researching as well as prepping other businesses. Being active at the business community created the environment in which she started to build up a concept that incorporated technology and the knowledge substance:

Kate: "I have lead organizations into growth in many ways, have been in large and family firms and small firms in different roles. And I've been as a consultant in which I've had to analyze things... --- This is like, that I've learned a lot about leadership, about this substance, and I try to make something useful out of it. --- Then there was the main partner and this head software developer, the three of us started to think together about this concept, which I had thought of, the concept we could create for companies and through what kind of technology."

Paul's path had been about gaining substance along with his corporate career, yet rather unaware of it. Substance knowledge and education of a certain industry and the various periods abroad had made him the expert of his own field in a very thorough manner. Starting a business around some special kind of knowledge is basically called a consulting company of a certain expertize. And that's what Paul did when the time was ripe and he had found a suitable partner:

Paul: "...we established a company of expertize consulting with my colleague... --- There was then conveniently someone who was also interested, so... that's when it began I guess."

Jake was a "part-time" inventor who realized that he had created something that someone might actually need. His substance knowledge could be seen in his ability to work on those invention projects, yet all of his career choices so far had been all following the same theme, from childhood to present. He had acknowledged the "plot" in his career and that he had been working in the same field of business for years. When there was enough substance, he took the leap to establish a company around it:

Jake: "At the same time I had been working on inventions, already since 2006. Then those inventions started to ripen. And I was talking with some businesses and it came across that I had my first customer. --- it is the connecting pattern in all of these (employments), so the path, the plot follows along the whole time."

To conclude, these entrepreneurs became entrepreneurs by realizing the market ache and their opportunities to become an international entrepreneur, initially because of their substance knowledge and expertise and personal desire. The in-

itial internal push factors, be it the desire to be international (reflecting the international identity construction) or the desire to utilize more of the substance knowledge (reflecting the entrepreneurial identity), unfolded along the narratives. There were differences in terms of what in particular was significant and what made the most sense to each of the entrepreneurs personally when they decided to become international entrepreneurs.

Though the construction of their international entrepreneurship was more or less awakened and pushed forward by their knowledge of a certain substance, it simultaneously reflected the international orientation of the person. In other words, these international entrepreneurs pursued entrepreneurship that was directed by their own knowledge substance and, moreover, their international identity. The global changes in the business environment and international opportunities would then serve as the last determinant that had to be adjusted to.

5.3 The entrepreneurial and international identity construction

Just like entrepreneurship in general, international entrepreneurship may possess different meanings when different dimensions of it are in focus. Whereas the definition of entrepreneurship become hazy in research, the interviewed entrepreneurs didn't have more of a definition for their own entrepreneurship as they made distinction between working with an entrepreneurial mindset and employing oneself. So, I took the challenge of extracting those certain identity dimensions defining these entrepreneurs as international entrepreneurs. The narrative identities were found in what they told about themselves, about what they do and how they act as a person; I sought for answers to questions like 'who am I', 'who do I think I am' or 'how I act as being' (Vignoles et al 2011).

When looking at the research question "what is international entrepreneurship?" through the data gathered for this research, the discussion opens up for the possibility of defining the phenomenon more precisely and from new perspectives. Focus is not simply on some specific personality traits and behavior of an entrepreneur or, on the other hand, limited to the internationalization strategies and decision-making of an impersonal company. The interest lies in the journey the international entrepreneur have taken from the beginning of identity construction to the point of the actualization and implementation of an international business venture.

I approach the question "what is international entrepreneurship?" by exploring "how does one identify oneself as an international entrepreneur" or "what does it mean to be an international entrepreneur". Therefore, I looked at the data through the lens of identity construction. When going further through the data, it became visible that foundational dimensions such as the environment and circumstances of events and experiences were important in relation to identity construction. The interviewees would kind of "set the stage" and narrate processes that lead to certain action and decision-making in life in general. Those

actions and decisions can be seen later on in the chronological timelines constructing the international, entrepreneurial, working as well as substance identity, more precisely presented in the next chapter. Those timelines present certain reflections of the personal identifications and changes in them along the international entrepreneurial journey. The formation of them is based on the categorization discussed from hereon.

Utilizing the categorization of internal push and external pull, I soon detected in the data that these factors could be possibly divided into two dimensions: the entrepreneurial dimension and the international dimension (see Figure 5). I call those dimensions the *entrepreneurial identity* and the *international identity*. These dimensions thus create the even bigger, theoretical, stage in which an individual becomes an international entrepreneur. Notably, these dimensions of identity communicate the international and entrepreneurial orientation (Covin & Wales 2011; Covin & Miller 2014) discussed in the earlier theory section.

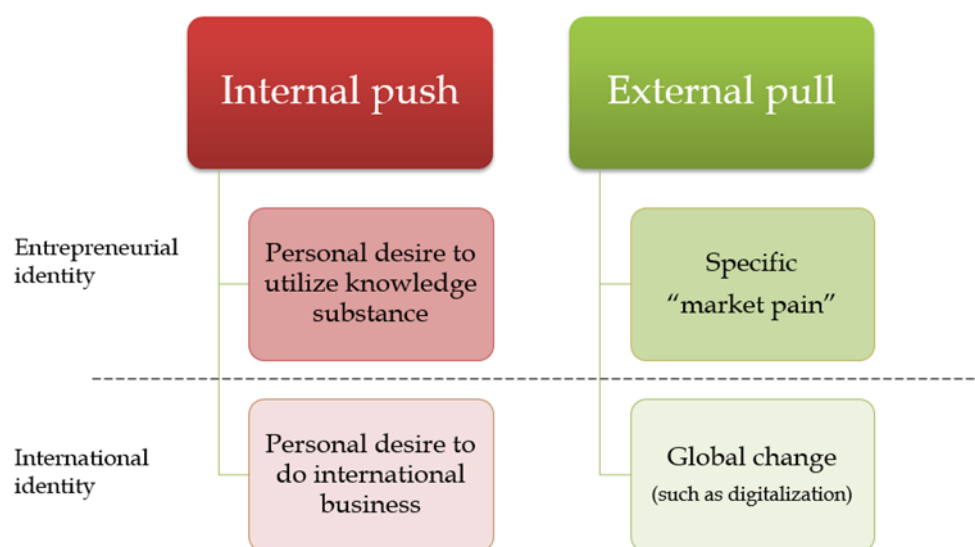


Figure 5 Dimensions of entrepreneurial and international identity

5.3.1 Dimensions affecting the construction of an international entrepreneurial identity

One dimension of the entrepreneurial identity seems to be the internal push of an individual's personal desire to utilize knowledge substance that one has acquired throughout the life experiences and career. Though, the desire may be there, the sole interest of becoming an entrepreneur is still blurred among other things. In the stories of the entrepreneurs, I detected that they all had identified themselves as entrepreneurs, yet most of them did not consider themselves as being only entrepreneurs but also something else. Many times the entrepreneurship was told through a desire to do something.

Paul had detected the entrepreneurial identity within himself already in the corporate world as he did not live by the working hours. Such orientation (or working identity) could be understood as of someone who actually likes his work

and lives through it to some extent. Heavy identification with the work itself is seen to be common among entrepreneurs as they usually invest their passion, time, money and other resources to the work they do and believe in (Cardon, Wincent, Singh & Drnovsek 2009). Intrapreneurship is a widely used term (Antoncic & Hisrich 2003), which was also used by two of the participants, relating and making sense of their entrepreneurial orientation along their former career paths.

Paul: "Maybe I've always been a bit workaholic. That I haven't counted the hours I've worked. Maybe in that sense I've been an entrepreneur... or entrepreneurially oriented." "---probably already when I have been working in these large companies, I have... It's called intrapreneurship, which of course isn't internal entrepreneurship because the risk is kind of not there..."

Paul would also identify entrepreneurial elements of his career choices in being a shareholder in a startup, in which the risks of the young company failing and losing some money. Which it eventually did. Such experiences gave Paul the chance to see first-hand what being an entrepreneur could be. Along the way, there had been the chance to get knowledge on how to run a business, and such experience made him more confident to think about establishing his own company:

Paul: "So, that it was somehow natural, like 'well, I probably know how to do this too'. And, I don't know how to explain it more precisely. It has been on my mind occasionally, and then, when an opportunity like this came along. So, why not now?"

Mark on the other hand had a dream which he started to pursue in University. Such experience gave him the initial feeling of being an entrepreneur, involving the exploitation of something he was passionate about:

Mark: "It was just like actualizing a dream and probably it somehow started from there... After running it for two years, that's when it gave the spark, like, 'damn how cool was that, executing such a thing!' All by yourself."

When thinking about his own journey into international entrepreneurship, Mark was not sure of his touchpoints onto entrepreneurship until the experiences in the university. He pondered whether he could categorize his grandfather as an entrepreneur of his own time since at that time farming was just what had to be done. It was not so much of a career choice. He also questioned whether entrepreneurship could be defined more nowadays.

Mark: "In the world of today, it could be quite hard to here draw the line what is entrepreneurship and what is not, but then [farming in the turn of 1800-1900 century] it has been rather clear that this is how it goes..."

Such reflection on entrepreneurship may communicate an attitude that does not want to highlight entrepreneurship as such. Later on Mark says that in his opinion entrepreneurship is not something to glorify. It may be interpreted, that his entrepreneurial identity has become part of who he is and how he expresses himself through what he does:

Mark: "...it is one way of working, it is one way of employing oneself, it's one way of fulfilling dreams. It's like an instrument, more than an object of glorification. In my opinion, something that should be glorified is the work itself. You're like, you're disciplined, you have passion and you have a desire to do it well. That should be glorified. Not entrepreneurship."

Jake thought about his own need for autonomy and "part-time" job as an inventor. Possibly the characteristics of being frustrated and discontent under employment tells us about an entrepreneurial identity growing within. Also, his willingness to work on projects and solutions outside of work tells a story of an entrepreneur with innovative approaches to solve problems. Paul's perspective on entrepreneurship was reflected upon the risk-taking experiences and just like Jake and Mark, he mentions the attitude towards hard work and autonomy:

Paul: "I've probably always been a bit of a work-a-holic, I haven't count the hours. So, maybe in that sense I've been an entrepreneur, or like entrepreneurially oriented. And every ones in a while, when I've really kind of had it, I have thought about it..."

Mark didn't see himself as the traditional 'sole entrepreneur' with the need to pursue a dream of his own but identified himself as part of a team where they could share the experience of doing something together and bring their contribution to the work.

Mark: "I am a co-entrepreneur... I am definitely not an entrepreneur doing it all by myself. --- When we three established the company, we had strengths that were complementary, at least when it came to my own strengths. They probably could've made it by themselves, but I would have not survived. I am the kind who wants to do things together... I really enjoy the success which we can reach together."

Such team orientation to work and entrepreneurship reveals the working and entrepreneurial identity to have a social aspect to it. Without these colleagues, it might be that Mark would have never become an entrepreneur, or at least not so fast after university.

Mark: "...and he said to me, after I had been leading those (processes), that 'buy the tool from me'. And I said 'I won't buy it by myself, I need to find a partner'."

The other dimension of entrepreneurial identity is the external pull; the need to satisfy a specific "market pain". This would include the sources of opportunities, excluding the rather internal processes which lead into the discovery and exploitation of opportunities and the individuals who take on the process of discovering and exploiting opportunities (Shane & Venkatamaran 2000).

If we consider the concept of entrepreneurial orientation for a while, we may say it is the force driving entrepreneurial activities. In the definition of entrepreneurial orientation, common denominators are the risk-taking, proactiveness to the market and the innovative approach in relation to the environment and decision-making (Covin & Wales 2011) and a rather distinct need for autonomy enabling opportunity-seeking and advantage-seeking behavior (Lumpkin et al 2009). Such dimensions were found in the narratives, intertwined and overlapping; one could not be isolated from another, and some dimensions would come out stronger than the others.

The dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation could be understood to be also the reflections of the internal push factors, such as the tendency to seek for innovative solutions or taking risk. Yet, such characteristics of the entrepreneur communicate the identity building into entrepreneurship in relation to the external pull factors. This means that the internal push is impacted by the external pull. Thereafter, an entrepreneur exploits the opportunity emerging due to external factors.

Many times risk-taking and, on the other hand, the belief into something that others seem to ignore, characterize an entrepreneurial journey and experimenting (Gartner et al 2004). In international entrepreneurship dimensions such as the need for risk-taking could be seen to become greater due to different external pull factors. A risk factor of a venture is usually perceived to have a negative impact on a desire to do something, yet for some it may serve as the opportunity to “gamble” and thus, affect positively on a decision. In general, international business includes risk-taking and challenges that one usually does not encounter domestically. An international environment is different in many ways, starting from cultural differences going all the way to company specific preferences and practices.

Though risk-taking is one of the characteristics of entrepreneurial orientation and one dimension of entrepreneurial venturing (Covin & Wales 2011), majority of the interviewees did not talk about risk in particular as they narrated about the decision of the establishing their business. Some of them did talk about risk-taking in general as they were narrating about life as an entrepreneur with limited resources and such, but the elements of risk-taking in the point of establishment was communicated quite differently. These international entrepreneurs seem to have been slightly cautious towards taking the risk when they were at the edge of deciding whether to establish an international business or not. Yet, I see the cautiousness of these entrepreneurs towards risk-taking more as activities and processes of reducing uncertainty around the decision making.

When the exploitation of a certain business opportunity emerged to Kate, people around her seemed to consider it as something rather unlikely to succeed due to the sensitive nature of their business. Luckily, Kate saw much deeper into the raw opportunity, decided to invest into it and was then surrounded by the right people with the same interests and vision. Eventually her successful enactment on the opportunity was a combination of risk-taking, innovative approach and initially proactiveness to the market:

Kate: “...and take a totally different technology for this, because what they had, was the kind of old Java code, it was too slow, we went like radically into this kind of cloud service. We thought about what could be done in Finland through this kind of web service... They all did say that it won’t sell, no one will set up such... But from there, now it has been and we started to build this... and now we are at the point that we just hired two more.” --- “But I was aware of it, when we started off... I would’ve not done this if I would’ve not seen that there was this kind of combination [of people and their talent].”

The uncertainty she encountered was bound to the technology, not so much to whether the software application was actually needed or the uncertainties in the

market. Not to speak of international opportunities it would enact upon. Kate's determination of making her business successful resounds in her need to "give back to the world":

Kate: "Through the technology and integrating these, through the former know-how and there is a clear need. And I see that this would become something useful, something that lives, so that people, many people could use it. Something that would help in many ways."

Two of the entrepreneurs emphasized that they already knew that the need for their service or product was real and that they were ready to take the step to establish a firm around it. Their proactive orientation to markets was evident: they had been talking with their potential customers and received feedback. Such affirmation from customers' side had also initially reduced uncertainty and, for example, the need of piloting services or products. Such market knowledge lets one start off with a ready customer base and a clearer vision of what is actually needed and why.

Jake: "And then I was talking with [different firms] and it occurred that I had gotten my first customer. And I had to make a decision of what to do: do I establish a business...?" --- "And then it come across so promising that I decided to throw myself into it." --- Then there were more [customers] coming, so that obviously the time was ripe and people were talking among each other and the need was real."

Kate: "I worked as a consultant ---. And at that point, customers frequently asked --- that 'isn't there anything?' And since I had repeatedly seen these processes, all the time, and I was like 'this sure is strange, that every time we start all over. No learning takes place. --- This is awfully inefficient and frustrating'."

It seems that Jake and Kate as well as the two others had well thought about their customer base, business models, partnerships and other relevant issues of their emerging business in order to reduce the feeling of uncertainty. The decision-making process of choosing the company form included some kind of companionship and social support, be it family, former colleagues or other kinds of partners sharing the imagined risk of establishing a business. Such social aspect of the decision-making might give the sense of reducing uncertainty aspects of doing business alone.

Mark: "And then I said, like, 'no I'm not going to buy it [a tool for analysis] alone', that I need to find a partner... and at that time I had already one of my clients, there were two guys, with whom we had like been already whispering that wouldn't it be great to have our own business one day."

Jake: "After that, my life as an entrepreneur began.. I've been first [before the current international business]... we established a store with one partner."

Paul: "There was then conveniently someone who was also interested, so... --- This is easy, this kind of consulting company, you just set it up. And yea, risk, sure, if you put some money into it, there is always the risk that you lose it. But if you go and want to buy a company, they tend to ask for deposits. That might be the reason to my wife's reserved attitude that 'now he's gonna go and take debt and buy that firm'... That might have impacted... choosing this type of business."

Such accounts of support could mean that the entrepreneurs do acknowledge and utilize their social circles when going about life decisions, e.g. changing career or creating a business and that they do not make the bigger decisions all alone. Others' opinions matter, and they want and need guidance and support. Sometimes it is financial, sometimes knowledge and capabilities, sometimes just someone to reflect with. For others it might be just about trusting someone and acknowledging the need for the outside guidance.

Kate: "All my own finances are tied into this, but then again, with the support of my husband, I've been able to... He's invested, along with me, into this at some critical stages... Small amounts but so that it has been important at that point. --- Because we can't do everything by ourselves. You can't be good at everything. You just can't. You have to appreciate what other people can do."

Jake: "...In my surroundings, I have quite many different kinds of entrepreneurs, so of course we talk about loads of things and it creates that kind of self-belief that 'if he will, I will be okay it too, damn it!'"

Mark: "But in that too, this one friend I trusted a lot... --- I had an enormous trust into this guy, like as a friend, you know, that he sees... and then I thought about it myself and that's exactly how it is. --- "

The social aspects of their entrepreneurship may reflect the external pull factors from another perspective. Social surroundings are external and distinct from our internal reality, yet many times we are naturally drawn to certain kinds of people. Some people push us away, and we may learn to avoid them. The internal reality of us as a person may come through in the way we let people affect our decision-making and construction of identity.

Paul hadn't identified any special need for social support in his life when he had been growing up and making career choices. Yet, the entrepreneurial as well as the international identity may still be reflected through the ways we interact upon our relationships and social environment. Despite his own experiences of not needing support, Paul had now an urge and motivation to support younger entrepreneurs as a mentor. He couldn't identify the time he had changed from being rather an arrogant manager into someone who cared for the others' success over one's own, but the time abroad had changed him. Or just becoming older and getting perspective on things? Could it be that the lack of it in his earlier career, the times abroad etc., could have triggered a desire in him to do the opposite for the others?

These aspects of the entrepreneurship such as risk-taking, proactive orientation to the market and innovative approaches to solving problems reflects the construction of an entrepreneurial and substance knowledge identity. The desire to utilize knowledge substance is followed by the actions and processes in which the uncertainty around an opportunity is tried to reduce into minimum. Financial and social support, for example, are kind of tools for an entrepreneur to cope with internal contradictions.

Though the rise of business opportunities and the potential of them would serve as the real enactment of becoming an (international) entrepreneur, the broader interest was still in other things in these narrative identities. Though, the

concrete business opportunity may be the rational reason for a certain company to come into existence, reasons for becoming an entrepreneur may initially be something else. Most of the accounts dealt with passion, valuing hard work, learning experiences and other experiences as well as the acquired knowledge substance. These were narrated over the sole interest of opportunity recognition and exploitation of it.

Mark: "---but actually I drifted (into entrepreneurship) by the substance. The business concept and the understanding of it was, like, very attractive."

(Note: a more precise description of business concept has been removed)

Mark: "But then again, what is connected to this entrepreneurship is the honoring of work. And in my opinion one of the most important attributes of entrepreneurship is that one honors the work one does. --- It has come from both sides of my family, very strongly, that one works hard and it is done well."

The internal push of international identity represented the personal desire to do international business. To start exploring the international entrepreneurial identity, it is significant to mention that the international orientation of the firms, or the decision to do international business with their firm, was not questioned in any of the interviewees' stories. Mark's statement sums it up quite nicely:

Mark: "One must have the international grip from the start. If one aims to do up-to-date business at all."

All of the businesses of the interviewees', not presenting the same industry or similar business models, were built on the idea that the international orientation of the business would undoubtedly expand the reach to more business opportunities. Some even felt it was inevitable.

Jake: "The opportunities for growth [in international markets] are totally different. --- all of the others [customers] are firms operating abroad, and that actually dictated, that when you have the world map in front of you, we have a customer on almost every continent already. And it came naturally, and the business is quite wide spread, meaning that if you get one customer you have covered already quite a few places."

Paul: "---also in this present work, it felt quite logical, when we established this consulting company with my colleague that the aim was to be international."

Though, service business, new innovation and technology had been the key sources for business of these entrepreneurs, the global reach was eventually serving as the key driver or as the obvious environment for operations. The importance of local presence had been acknowledged, thus, all of the participants' companies had rapidly expanded, not only by serving international markets via internet or exporting, but placing either agents or international offices abroad as well.

Cultural knowledge and familiarity with the local ways were narrated through accounts of cultural experiences. Such narratives can be seen as reflections of the international identity. Kate strongly emphasized the importance of going abroad to see it for yourself. Though it is not necessary to travel all of the

time nowadays and be abroad so much in order to do international business, one still needs to acquire cultural knowledge through the environment of another country and culture.

Kate: "But of course, if you don't have cultural understanding, it is good to acquire it from somewhere else. --- You just interpret from your own groundings and in your own environment, but you aren't then in that other environment. Profoundly it cannot happen that way."

Paul had gained knowledge through training, yet the real knowledge was acquired through international experience:

Paul: "They didn't let me go to the States before they had put me into this training, this culture training. --- And then, when I came back from the States, I wasn't the same guy anymore."

Having nothing against or lacking a better argument of why not going international with their businesses, the personal preferences to go international markets resound in the narratives as well. It seems that experiences and background weigh a lot in their international entrepreneurial journey, not only the external pull as it may seem from afar. These desires and preferences reflect international identity.

Paul: "I don't know... know-how is maybe a wrong word, but if we think of communicating with different people, with different cultures, it has become natural for me in the course of many years. Then, in this firm, perhaps one aims to advance what one is good at. --- First one ends up into international tasks, then it feels natural, and then one seeks into such."

Mark: "I've been provided [with multicultural] already in my childhood. --- One could imagine that speaking several languages or contacting with strangers has been a bit easier for me."

Jake: "I've travelled quite a bit. --- A lot you have to learn on your own. On one hand it has been due to travelling, on the other hand due to my employment for (the company x). --- That was when it first opened up for me. --- I like international business, it's much more colorful than the Finnish... When you know all the people and you know the practices from many years, it can become quite boring."

Kate: "...my international (orientation) had started already when I had gone to Sweden the first time. I told my parents that I go work for a farm. --- Culture has always been interesting. It is totally different how the young people nowadays, for example... now that everything is in the internet and it is open and you find it there... Back then we had nothing."

While these international entrepreneurs had both experience as well as the interest in going abroad with their businesses, one of them dares to put into words some of the main challenges small companies face when making the decision of internationalizing a business:

Jake: "One part of it is fear... If you don't have the money... And then, if you start a business without an investor, you will quite strictly think of what you can afford and how things should be done. What triggers then... if you have a good product and you find a financier who believes in you and supports you, it then enables you to think about going international as well."

It becomes clear in the narratives of two of the interviewees that some people might fear the expansion to international markets due to the lack of support. Despite of internal desire or external pull, money may create a major obstacle. While it asks for money to put up a business domestically and the lack of capital lessens the number of people that actually establishes, international venturing may ask drastically more capital. Investors are needed in order to make a producing/manufacturing company succeed the operational barriers faced in shipment, production, inventory etc.

Jake: "When you go into international business, you need a financier for sure. Something small one could have probably done, or if doing software development or some one-man thing, then one might have survived without financing. But that we started to create models and international business, it demanded money, in a totally different way...."

In Mark's opinion, one should be cautious when talking about being international and going through internationalization. He sees it different when one is international and needs support to be international than when one seeks to internationalize. This may reflect his internal push or desire of being a born global, skipping completely the process of becoming one. It may also manifest the shift from traditional ways of thinking of international business processes into a new era of international business. Overall, these narratives reflect the international identity as a construct of background, experiences and personal desire growing along the journey, some aspects communicated stronger than others. Such identity construction process of an international entrepreneur may then contribute to the concept of the international entrepreneurial orientation, reflecting the formation of the international orientation.

The global change, such as the phenomenon of digitalization, serves as a strong external pull factor for constructing the international identity. One of the general reasons companies have turned to look increasingly at international markets is the explosively growing global access and development of technology and innovations during the past decades. While the international business used to be financially possible only for large multinationals or with certain expansion strategies, the game has changed drastically during the recent years. Innovations today do not need million scale investments as they used to, but new disruptive business ideas are in the reach of small, and even one-man, businesses. Such global changes are reflected in the interviewees' accounts. International business opportunities that the entrepreneurs exploit are catalyzed by the technological development, more precisely, the digitalization.

In this perspective, the change in the business environment changes the meaning of international business and thus international entrepreneurship as well. This means, smaller and smaller companies are able to access international markets and entrepreneurship is getting a whole new level to it. One of the interviewees had acknowledged the latest development trends to be strongly significant for their contemporary business environment. The environment determines largely the way they operate:

Mark: "What has impacted the international [orientation] the most, like as a whole, within the business we are in, is the digitalization. It has like... It has brought the world so much closer to each other. Or has shrunk the world so that... if in the beginning everything went to the web, then everything became mobile, now this wave of digitalization is coming."

Mark had concretely experienced it himself already in the past and acknowledged the technological changes in his personal life:

Mark: "I remember, I got, there was this trial service... I was part of this university test group, I got a text message of the scores of the exams. It was awesome, really. --- I remember one time on the frozen sea, I was skiing, and then I checked my mobile, like, 'hey I got a four out of five, great!'"

Also Kate saw the changes and technology advancements making it possible to do what their company was doing, and adding new dimensions into both operative perspective and the strategic perspective, yet later on acknowledging that it would make it challenging in terms of information security etc.:

Kate: "...we sell only through internet. We don't go sell at all, but we sell everything through web, for example since we have... our global client, so that we had never met them, and neither any other of the clients, everything is done through web."

The experiences in former corporate work had given her the advantage of understanding the importance of developing systems and technological solutions:

Kate: "I knew the technology things from there, as much as one can learn of them. And I had sat in projects, technology projects all the time, and strategy projects... I had followed the technology and methods, practices all of the time. And then I did... when I came back to Finland, our process of order delivery... It was this kind of a home-made software, PC program... and I stated that our devices change, like, from one device to a module, so our system did not support its deliveries. --- And since we didn't get it from anywhere, I developed the software project."

These two entrepreneurs, with a software innovation in their core business, saw the vast impact the digitalization had given their own international entrepreneurial path. Anyone could set up businesses with the help of modern technology and the location could be basically anywhere.

Mark: "Digitalization, it has like, the concreteness in it, which has made it possible for a 20-year-old young man or woman to do international business no matter where in the world."

International business opportunities and the exploitation of them were not seen that much dependent on location, but could be enacted upon over long distance, both domestically as well as over national borders. The environment was global, changing the way one viewed practical work environment of an entrepreneur.

Mark: "This [digitalization], at the latest, has brought that kind of... That if you think you'd have a company X in somewhere town Y, it can operate globally, because it can use the cloud and offer service through there. In terms of our service, it doesn't matter whether we are in Vaasa, Seinäjoki, Tampere or where our office is located. Since it is in the cloud, our service, we don't have to have an office anywhere, we can work from home even."

Just like Mark, also Paul, Kate and Jake had colleagues around Finland as well as in other countries within the reach of a Skype call or a cloud service where information could be shared in real time. International entrepreneurship was, in this sense, defined by the ability and capability to work without borders, internationally without a specified time or space.

If reflected on these external pull factors, it becomes evident that these entrepreneurs know that it is important to follow the on-going changes and trends in the global environment. But what might become hazy, is the line between the overall business knowledge and substance, and the personal traits and desires guiding entrepreneur's actions and decisions. In Kate's account, and pretty much her whole journey, it seems that sometimes the desire to do something becomes well integrated with the knowledge one has acquired and vice versa:

Kate: "I see those changes, I see technological changes... I have always been sort of a visionary. That I foresee in advance, I listen to trends, signals carefully. --- This kind of understanding of global growth, knowledge and all of this, how to grow and take risk and what comes next..."

Experience as an internal push factor

When working in the corporate world, there were different sources from which three of the interviewees gathered the entrepreneurial experiences and some also detected the intrapreneurial mindset in their personal ways of working. Like mentioned, Mark had had the dream of putting up a business since studying in the university. Paul had had share ownership and a leadership position in a start-up and Jake had all along felt the need to invent something new and finally something he saw would serve the customers better. Kate, just like Jake and Paul, had spent time abroad, representing their corporation and had tried to figure out how to grow business remotely and away from the domestic networks. Such experiences may have had the effect of catalyzing the growth internationally, moreover, making it easier to, at least mentally, start international business from early on.

Having had a former career in the corporate world or not, things such as board membership, share ownership and partnership as well as largely independent sales and consultant positions in global operations would over time become meaningful in order to utilize the experience of leadership, power, risk-taking and opportunity exploitation internationally. Through such experiences one would evidently acquire new knowledge and grow the storage of substance.

Kate: "I had been nine years in the board and gone through a generational shift and I had been in a family business already before, so... I had like this kind of entrepreneurial background, quite a lot of understanding and experience, also, although I'd done my main career in the corporation. And then, as a consultant, one must analyze things which one doesn't normally need to do in the same manner in the corporate world. --- No one had been in that kind of role before in the world. I was the first in the corporation who was sent abroad and there was no support, no understanding of what it means when you go work abroad. Or what kind of support you need there. I've like created them all. --- When we expanded, we were in hundred countries, did business and had organizations all around the world --- so of course I have a lot of cultural understanding..."

Paul: "I became a partner with share ownership and there was the... there was, maybe for the first time, there was risk in it too. Unfortunately it went off, but... But one couldn't know it back then. Then there was that element of entrepreneurship in it. --- [A]nd in that point, I had lived abroad a good amount. And somehow it felt natural, when that period [abroad] ended, that in the next company, which was this more or less start-up company, that I'd try, at an early enough stage, to internationalize its operations. I didn't really think about it, maybe I should have."

One had been doing personal inventions based on the unmet needs of the customers he had been talking to while employed to someone else. The inability to make things better and exploit opportunities under the employment was hindering the entrepreneurial potential and building up the frustration. In other words, the innovative approaches were explored while being proactive in the market through other work:

Jake: "And then, when you work for someone else, you can, like, sense it in yourself, that this kind of person cannot feel truly content in someone else's service. Since you want to do more and sometimes you want to do things as good as possible... --- Then, at some point, these pieces go together, the decision is quite natural when I realize that 'hey, I've invented a product on my own' and I realized that the companies want it, it would bring them savings and... --- When I have developed the product myself and I've been there [in the international business field], that I know actually what goes on [within the business]. How these solutions enhance the [clients'] operations. Basically, I should be like constantly there, travelling abroad with my backpack."

Such accounts of entrepreneurial elements are found throughout the interviews. While some of the narratives emphasized the elements proactiveness to the market, some dealt with risk-taking or innovative approaches to new opportunities. Unconventional practices that characterized the overall business environment were discussed along with organizational culture. Kate went through with a renewal of a system in her corporation. She saw a need for a new solution, whereas no one else understood the critical need of it. With her entrepreneurial mindset, she was eager to try and possibly fail with the trial.

Kate: "We knew that it probably had some mistakes, people wouldn't like it, but was it good enough so that we can pull it together? We then decided that two weeks we would run it, and if it didn't work, we would manually do it all again. But we would manage through it somehow. But it worked well enough, so that we could continue forward. And these are... At that time I took that kind of a risk... No one in that firm understood, my managers didn't understand it..."

The discovery and exploitation of profitable opportunities is in the center of entrepreneurship (Shane & Venkataraman 2000; 217). Throughout the data, I detected the business opportunities arose from the own interests of the interviewees, in other words, by the internal push. The motivation for entrepreneurship and actions would stem from inside and the belief that certain issue should and could be solved would steer the path into certain direction.

Also, a need for change would serve as the key driver for the entrepreneurs to take action, both in personal life but also in the organizations they were part of. Serving as the agents for change (Toma et al 2014), the stories unfold personal experiences of events that communicated issues such as confusion of career choices, disagreements with bosses, organizational inertia, lack of innovation or even societal needs and issues that should be taken care of.

As an example of a strong sense of a growing international entrepreneurial identity, the account of the earlier parts of Kate's entrepreneurial journey communicates special determination to be part of a global change and courageously go forward with the internal push. She had experienced a situation where she had been the one of few women with such position in the industry at that time. She was given the challenge to be the change, and yet she did not see anything that would hold her back to do what she wanted to do.

Kate: "---because, there hadn't been women in the field of technology in the 80's in Finland, or the world. In 1988, when I started as a sales director... there weren't women in the technology world, in that role... We just didn't go public with those things, because of the conservative public relations and the kind --- But I am kind of, like, naïve... I don't mind, I don't even concenter the option... I never thought, I knew, I read what people were saying, but I never thought it had anything to do with me."

These entrepreneurs are thus known through their actions and activity, making behavioral (Covin & Slevin 1991; Toma et al 2014) and their internal choices and desire the key elements in the process of international entrepreneurial identity catalyzed by external pull factors.

If we here consider the inception (not yet the establishment) of an entrepreneurial venture of these international entrepreneurship, we might see a connection between certain aspects of the theoretical framework. The formation of international entrepreneurship includes much of the entrepreneurial orientation on individual level, sense-making of experience both international and entrepreneurial and the social and cultural environment of an organization enabling entrepreneurial and international orientation to increase. While some theory suggest that entrepreneurial opportunities and innovative practices are found when the organization enable corporate entrepreneurship or intrapreneurship (Christensen 2005), it may actually be that the individual originally possesses an entrepreneurial orientation despite the organization. Though organizations have been the place of growth, identity is built up on personality factors or family and other social aspects of life.

It is possibly then that point of inception in time where the development of the entrepreneurial orientation of an organization starts, or an entrepreneurially orientated person decides to leave the "safe" environment of an organization in order to pursue an opportunity. Thus, on an individual identity level, the formation of an entrepreneurial orientation might have started a long way back down the history lane (Crick 2009), even before an opportunity emerges. In other words, the entrepreneurial process could be said to be evolving through the individual's life course and continues its evolvment through the establishment and growth phases of a firm.

International entrepreneurship and its development is therefore a process, or an evolving journey, where the entrepreneur is the actor/voyager, enacting on international opportunities, and the international entrepreneurship is the scene where one explores new scenery. In this study, the entrepreneur is acting as the sense-giver to the scene in which international business opportunities have emerged, interpreting the episodes of one's life events and situations in relation

to the current possibilities. In order to identify themselves in the midst of the scene of creating an international business, they construct an identity of an international entrepreneur.

6 IDENTITIES OF INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEURS

In this chapter I will introduce you to the four different international entrepreneurial identities featured in this research: The Seeker, The Native, The Pioneer and The Explorer. Each of these international entrepreneurs have walked their unique life path and made it through the personal processes of becoming an international entrepreneur. They have all made the decisions to take their businesses into the international market owing to their personal and distinct reasons in which experiences, circumstances and certain events have given extensive contribution.

Since the field of international entrepreneurship would benefit of an increase in examining “how, by whom, and with what effects” (Oviatt & McDougall 2005b: 7) international entrepreneurial opportunities are acted upon, I looked for traces of sense-making processes of the narratives. The research problem setting based on the need to deepen understanding over the identity construction of internationalized entrepreneurs and how these are embedded in their life history and experiences, tends to seek answer to our research question “what is meaningful?” as the process goes on. In order to understand the identity construction processes better, it may be found helpful to summarize these identity typologies in relation to former research acknowledgments.

As the definition of international entrepreneurship keeps evolving (Oviatt & McDougall 2005b), it seems relevant to incorporate certain key concepts into the same picture for a brief comparison of knowledge constructs. Concepts emerging from the present data analysis as well as previous research, such as the INV (Oviatt & McDougall 1994) and Uppsala model theory (Johanson and Vahlne 1977) and entrepreneurial orientation (Covin & Wales 2011), are presented in relation to each other in Table 2. The purpose of such an organizing table is to rationalize to some extent my process of constructing the identities – or typologies.

If we shortly go over the columns of Table 2, one may follow the logic of it better. The international entrepreneurial identities (IEI) are represented in the first column. Dimensions of being entrepreneurial oriented are the innovative approach, proactiveness to the market, and risk-taking in relation to the environment and decision-making as well as the need for autonomy (Covin & Wales 2011;

Lumpkin et al 2009). These dimensions are ranked on the scale low-moderate-high, reflecting the “intensity” of each attribute of the entrepreneurial orientation through the interviewees’ narratives. International orientation towards global business in this case means the desire and recognition of competitive advantage that comes from reaching over domestic borders (Oviatt & McDougall 1994; Jones & Coviello 2005; Schweizer et al 2010) and therefore discusses the “why does it make sense to do international business” for the entrepreneur and what unveils the orientation in action and sense-making within the narratives.

Whereas large companies have been traditionally seen as practicing gradual internationalization processes Johanson and Vahlne’s (1977) Uppsala model, INV’s are recognized to find their initial business model and orientation to be international from the scratch (Oviatt & McDougall 2005a; Fernández Olmos & Díez-Vial 2015.) Here, we can see the participants’ companies representing either the type of an INV or “a combination”, meaning that the entrepreneur him or herself represents a certain sense-making process which alters the whole company. As it has become clear earlier, in this research the discussion has tried to shift the emphasis from organizational internationalization processes to international entrepreneurship and the sense-making of entrepreneur since the interest is on the individual per se. Therefore the personal internal push and external pull discussed in the previous chapter (Figure 4 and 5) are discussed in relation to the other dimensions: reasons for becoming an international entrepreneur consider the dimensions of internal sense-making and the external environment in which the entrepreneur operated in and practices human agency in relation to their entrepreneurial and international identity (orientation).

A significant notion throughout the data was that these entrepreneurs were not just entrepreneurs with a single point decision to run an international business: they have been on a discovering journey and grown into what they are now. What made it interesting to explore their journeys to international entrepreneurship was the early notion that the international entrepreneur within them was born and raised along the way. Thus, I may guess that the stories don’t end here: the adventures continue across borders and generational changes, and across the changes of global phenomena. Personal desires and dreams, environment, circumstances and social surroundings change and so does the international entrepreneur and one’s perspective of the world.

The story lines, or the typologies, of the international entrepreneurs are going to be presented in figures through 6 to 9 showing a timeline of events, turning points, meetings of significant people and so on. The purpose of a timeline like this is to illustrate visually the different paths an international entrepreneur may take, separating the international and entrepreneurial dimensions for easier reading. You can find the story lines presented at the end of each identity typology. These international entrepreneurial identities were named according to the findings detected during the analysis of the different process dimensions. For better anonymity, these identities are not specifically linked to the industry or other profiling done in the analysis.

IEI	Entrepreneurial Orientation					International orientation	International business theories		Internal push	External pull
	Risk-taking tendency	Need for autonomy	Innovativeness	Proactiveness	International orientation		INV	"Uppsala model"		
Explorer	High (→ Lower) Willing to take risk & explore the new; "calms down" over time → less interest taking risk	High The need to excel and "do one's own thing"	High Inventions as the base for business; constantly explores better ways of doing	Moderate Through close interaction with customers/market	"Forced" to go beyond national borders; learns by exploring, doing and through experience	INV Uppsala to INV "A combination"; INV by definition, yet past experience from corporate practices	Substance knowledge as an action motivator → Desire for international business as enabler	"Market pain" /opportunity as an action motivator → Global changes as business enabler and context		
Pioneer	High Started a risky business which is still possible to fail; may turn into moderate	High Does not feel the need for support; chooses the ones to work with	Moderate to High New approach to old; business idea based on extensive knowledge	High Follows the trends carefully in order to react quickly	Earlier job taught the practice; past and own interest a driving force; "cultures are interesting"	INV Global player; digital approach enables reach beyond trad. limitations	Substance knowledge as an action motivator → Desire to IB as enabler	"Market pain" as a motivator → Global changes as an enabler		
Native	Moderate Risk-taking involves others → making decisions based team efforts	Lower Finds strength in team work; is able to get oneself heard in a group as an individual	Moderate New ideas and areas through practices and channels that are initially well-known to entrepreneur	High Multidisciplinary approaches to business environment; agile attitude towards the global changes	Born into a multicultural setting; sees the business environment initially as a global arena	INV A true "born global"	Substance and entrepreneurial orientation as an action motivator → IB as given	Global change as a motivator → "Market pain" as enabler		
Seeker	Moderate Tends to seek for information to do research before risky action	Moderate to High No need for special support; appreciates company and peer work	Moderate Business based on former knowledge and profession	Moderate to high Seeks for better practices by researching/screening the business env.	Previous work taught international orientation; got training; gained interest through life abroad	Uppsala to INV "A combination" due to a past in a very trad. industry, now global reach via digit.	IB as motivator → Substance knowledge as enabler	Market pain as a motivator → Global change as enabler		

Table 2 International entrepreneurial identity

6.1 The Explorer

The Explorer is a true explorer both in the international and entrepreneurial sense. Whereas some might study and prepare oneself for going abroad, The Explorer has gone and learned by doing. Sometimes it means making foolish mistakes, but The Explorer takes it as an adventure more than anything. In the entrepreneurial explorations, The Explorer will constantly experiment and try to find the best solutions for the customers. The easiest and common way does not suit The Explorer, since the experimental way detects deeper problems that need fixing.

The Explorer has found the substance of his business before the entrepreneurial orientation gets actualized in the form of a real business venture. Working life has started in the early adulthood and The Explorer has already then searched for personal boundaries in terms of school as well as by working like crazy – having a high working moral is needed in order to keep on solving those problems. When The Explorer finds what is missing in life, “one’s own thing”, it is possible to carry on with the chosen path and never look back on other options that didn’t feel right.

The Explorer’s childhood has given the experience of being part of an entrepreneurial family, steering the wheel into the direction of problem solving. Yet, back then the thought of self being an entrepreneur has maybe not been an attractive option. There would be much less of a hassle in being employed by someone else, The Explorer concludes. Still, when the time gets boring or just frustrating at a work place, The Explorer starts to seek a way out and coming up with a way of expressing the real identity as an inventor and a problem solver.

The substance knowledge constructing one’s identity that reflects the professional side, comes out as innovative solutions to clients within the international business. Entrepreneurship starts to become an option, though it might have not been an option in the past. Without a special international background, The Explorer has had the chance to explore the world under one’s own interest or the previous employments and is therefore able to see the international opportunities coming along with the inventions. Customers are spread globally, and are that already from the start, therefore travelling and conquering new market environments remain mandatory, yet very interesting to The Explorer.

As a conclusion, such international orientation isn’t a problem for The Explorer since the international identity has become stronger through travels and exploration. The earlier desire to see things and do crazy things as well as risk-taking tendency has remained, though age will eventually wear off some edge. The Explorer’s personality and attitude of taking risks both in business and abroad reflects the desire to explore. Also, generally trusting people makes it easier to trust life also: mistakes are nothing to be afraid of and everyone finds their own way. Thus, international entrepreneurship is an eternal matter of exploration.

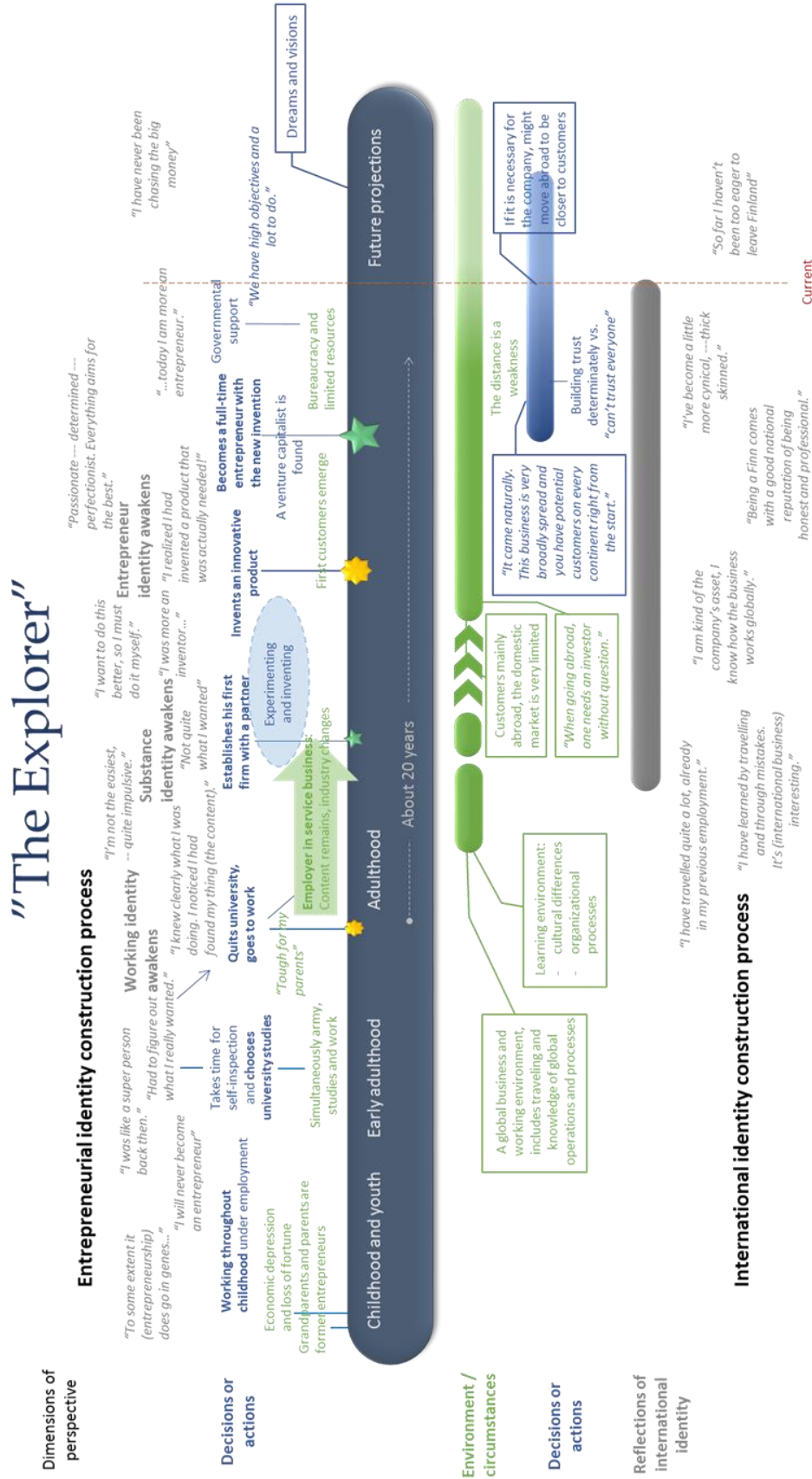


Figure 6 Constructing the IE identity: The Explorer

6.2 The Pioneer

The Pioneer is a tough one. Through many paths one has gone to initially alone and as the first one. If not first of all, at least pioneering the path without sufficient support of people around. The attitude of survival that has been given as a side effect on challenging life situations (e.g. for years fighting against health issues) have taken The Pioneer through the grey stone and developed one to take the lead. The Pioneer has taken companies abroad and established original systems in order to ease the work of the ones coming behind The Pioneer. Support in the international working tasks has been little and one has survived by establishing personal networks. Also by putting up a business, which is told to have no successful future and still making it fly, The Pioneer demonstrates determination of an individual that won't settle for little and is ready to fight the odds.

Working many years abroad builds up a strong pioneering character that survives new cultural shocks and meeting with various unexpected differences in people or processes. The Pioneer is self-trained not to let it get under one's skin. In order to feel safe or supported, networks of peer entrepreneurs are not needed by The Pioneer; the feeling of safety and support comes from close people and loved ones, personal beliefs and strong values. Such values guide the way as a star in the horizon. One can easily go alone and do what is important in order to reach goals and objectives. Yet, an individual is always important and no human being is overlooked since The Pioneer knows what matters in order to survive this life among people.

Life events, challenges and other, will toughen the cookie, still keeping the heart warm for life and development. Family, work and personal life are all intertwined since The Pioneer is living out a quest deep in the heart, otherwise the mission is empty. What has been given, one must put into use for a greater common good.

If one must be the first - be it to apologize, go abroad, or even to be an experimentee for something new - The Pioneer would be willing to take the risk. The attitude of learning by doing, not fearing and by experiencing it through working hard for an outcome, helps The Pioneer to survive challenging situations where real guts are needed. Slight naïve approach towards people yet relentless attitude for justice has given The Pioneer strength to overcome the luring fear and obstacles of international business and a tough industry. For the Pioneer, being an international entrepreneur isn't too different from being "alone" and "new on the field", carrying out a mission to succeed.

"The Pioneer"

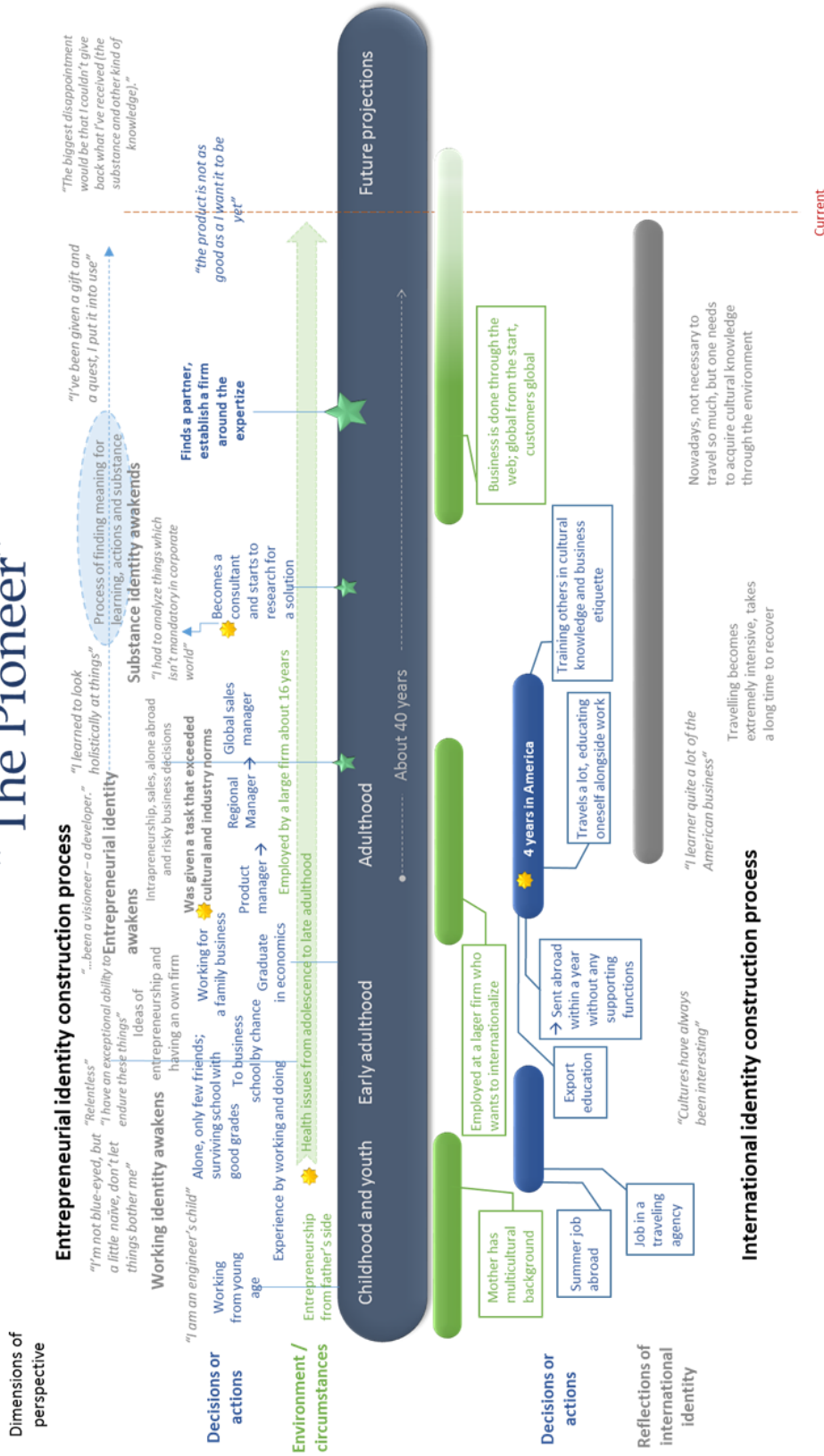


Figure 7 Constructing the IE identity: The Pioneer

6.3 The Native

The Native is an international entrepreneur from the get-go. Moving across borders at a young age and raised by different cultural influences makes one a little bit more of a globetrotter than someone who hasn't. In the entrepreneurial sense, The Native perceives entrepreneurship as a way of working, nothing more or nothing less. It is not a matter of glory as such. No big deal. Yet, it is deep in the core of The Native and one cannot imagine to work for someone else's dreams.

Though, somewhat lacking a background of a family of entrepreneurs, The Native has a dream of becoming an entrepreneur rather early. Experiences of creating something on one's own and building up a business makes The Native realize the importance of passion and dreams. Passion towards something creates a desire to pursue something that would have meaning personally, then also globally. A substance is possibly found under an employment but the ideas get wings all along. Then, when the right people come together uniting a common passion, the international entrepreneurial business venture can be actualized.

"Internationality" of the contemporary world, and business, is given in The Native's opinion. The Native believes we are all affected by the globalization and digitalization, meaning that we cannot but accept that business is international, like it or not. The Native is convinced the world is open and sets no boundaries for business. Such an attitude may also be reflecting age and generational aspects, since The Native is rather young in relation to the other international entrepreneurs.

Much so, the international orientation comes from the genes of The Native and the customer interface is within The Native's comfort zone. The communicational aspects and languages are never giving the headache for The Native and encountering different people is many times easier to The Native than to others. The groundings for encountering difference is there from the beginning. The Native never thinks business as solely domestic: business must be natively international entrepreneurial – just like the founder.

"The Native"

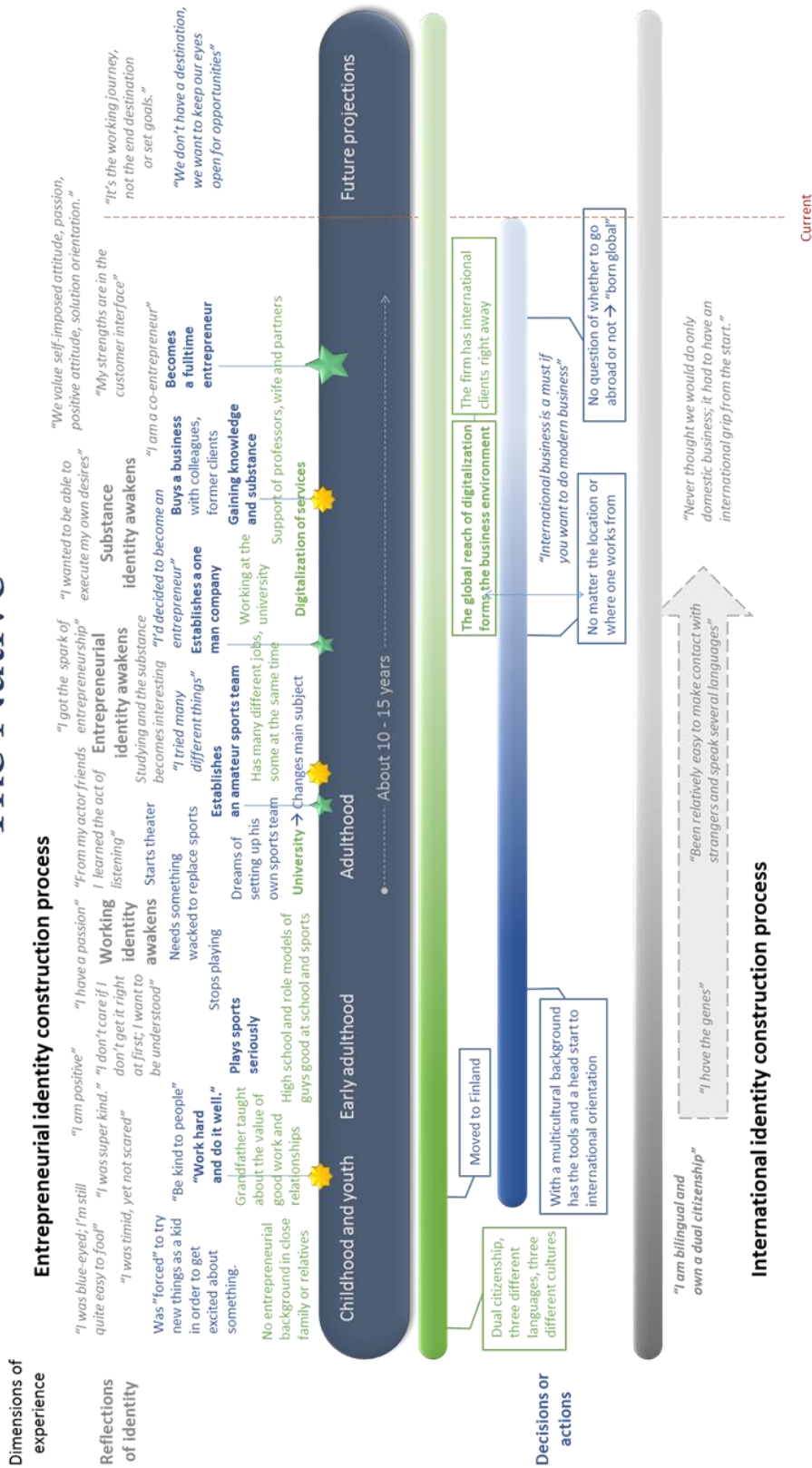


Figure 8 Constructing the IE identity: The Native

6.4 The Seeker

The Seeker has a desire to look over the ordinary, be it national borders or work life. Business and personal life, being internationally active is vital for the soul of The Seeker. If something is to get excited about, it is something to do with being international. If The Seeker gets bored with the present, there is always new opportunities to seek for.

Through increasing number of international tasks The Seeker gets within the context of employment, one will be desiring more of it. One seeks to take life into the international context. The Seeker has a special interest towards helping and developing international business of companies. Attitude towards other cultures and differences in people gives The Seeker the ability to look beyond disrespect, jealousy and pride over one's own nationality. The Seeker remains calm in culturally challenging situations, seeks for understanding and stays humble in difficult situations, knowing that we all possess a different perspective.

Life teaches The Seeker like it has taught The Explorer and The Pioneer. Yet, living abroad and through experiences has been boosted by education and cultural training since The Seeker is keen on learning new things and seeking more knowledge. Such an approach becomes handy in order to reflect on blind spots towards others, for example foreign people. Experience has also taught caution and patience towards internationalization of business operations.

The Seeker seeks to make international business more desired among the peers by researching into the subject of internationalization and the challenges other entrepreneurs encounter. The genuine desire of The Seeker to help and serve as a mentor for less experienced peer entrepreneurs does reflect the personality of someone who values companionship and seeks for connection and better practices. A different kind of respect for others and their distinctiveness becomes also reflected through the need for self-determination. The Seeker does not need too much support and survives well without. Yet, The Seeker seeks for help when it is needed.

"The Seeker"

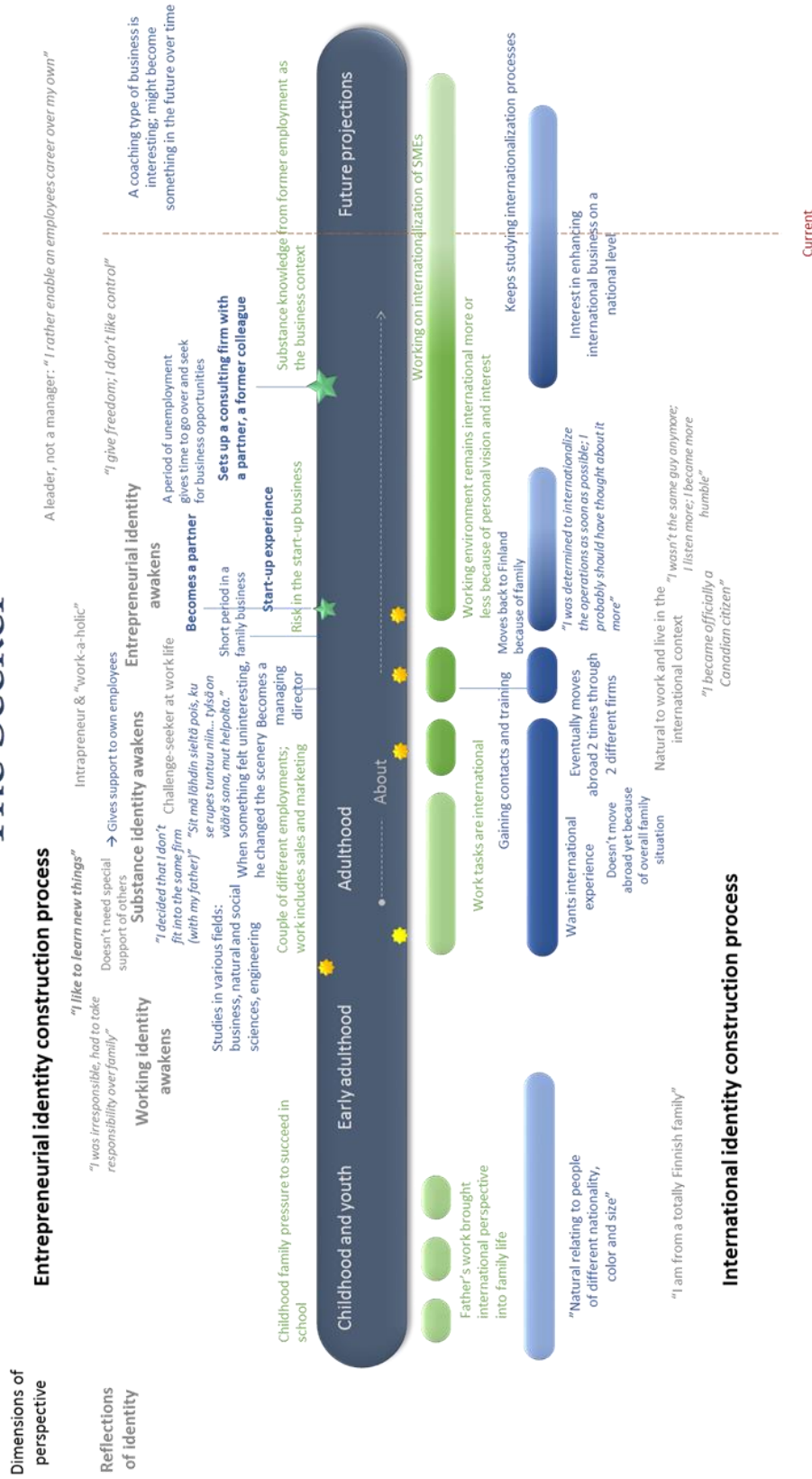


Figure 9 Constructing the IE identity: The Seeker

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to gain explanatory understanding on how the sense-making paths of international entrepreneurs get their form within the international and entrepreneurial context. Moreover, the quest was to find out what the sense-making and identity construction process is in becoming an international entrepreneur. Much interest was casted over the reasoning why these entrepreneurs have taken a certain path; what have made sense to them when they narrate about their international entrepreneurship. Alongside, the data would assumedly show us more of what international entrepreneurship actually is.

The preliminary focus of the research was in knowing why and how do former professionals become international entrepreneurs. It seems that the findings point us to four different reasons which allow the process of becoming international entrepreneur to start and evolve over the course of time. The reasons stem from the notions of personal narratives of experiences reflecting international and entrepreneurial orientation. The reasons seem to be partly internal and partly external. Sense-making processes that are rooted in internal pull factors guide initial paths into entrepreneurship and international orientation. Such factors could mean that inner and personal reasons are the primary motivator for international entrepreneurship rather than the environment one operates in. Yet, the external factors are crucial enablers, by which the discovery, exploitation and enactment of e.g. international entrepreneurial opportunities is possible. External pull factors enable the negotiation of meaning and identity (Wenger 1998) on a higher level, meaning that through the external reality international entrepreneurs may “validate” their internal push factors.

The reasons for international entrepreneurship reflect certain dimensions building up the stage for constructing the international entrepreneurial identity. The other internal push factor, the desire to utilize substance knowledge, and the other external pull factor, the enactment on “market pain”, may represent and help define entrepreneurial identity of these international entrepreneurs. Through these two dimensions the entrepreneur identifies oneself with the entrepreneurial orientation. This could mean that in becoming an international entrepreneur, the substance knowledge and a specific cause for action is seen mean-

ingful. Moreover, the other internal push and external pull factors, being the desire to do international business and the global changes, seem to become meaningful when identifying oneself with an international identity. Former experience in international business or multicultural background creates an internal desire to utilize that knowledge. Change in the global environment (business, culture, etc.) is a different kind of force, enabling an international entrepreneur to validate the international orientation of oneself.

As a conclusion, we may see the reasoning of becoming an international entrepreneur relying on former knowledge and experiences. Processes of constructing an international entrepreneurial identity take “tours” into the social and individual aspects, but emphasizing the personal preference of action throughout the process. While (domestic) entrepreneurship in general may have more variety in the reasons of starting an entrepreneurial business (Dawson & Henley 2012), it seems that international entrepreneurship requires a rather different mindset and approach to look at. Though entrepreneurship and internationalization processes are noticed to be rather similar (Andersson 2011), international entrepreneurship gains its own distinct features. It is possible that international entrepreneurship is not only about an entrepreneur strategically taking a business into new markets and internationalizing a business, but it may sometimes actually reflect more of a lengthy process, forming an international entrepreneurial identity.

As in any identity construction, also international entrepreneurial identity may gain new dimensions as time goes by (Gee 2001; Zare-ee & Ghasedi 2014). Entrepreneurial orientation may be reflected through different characteristics at different times in life as well as the international orientation. Sometimes one is keen on travelling and seeing the opportunities internationally, and sometimes one just wants to focus on developing the present business as such. Aligning as well as adapting (Burke 2006) may occur over time and change the orientation focus of an international entrepreneur. Such change in identity may occur due to the external pull factors (e.g. the industry development) or internal push factors (e.g. personal growth, style or even family situations).

The configuration of the different dimensions lead into finding different perspectives into international entrepreneurship and consequently into typologies of the narratives through which the identities became visible. Within the identity constructions paths of the international entrepreneurs we may detect different dimensions of perspectives that together create the “fabric of the international entrepreneurial experience”. These paths, then looked into more carefully one by one, included the awakening of the more specific substance identity, the working identity and the entrepreneurial identity. Such identities would emerge in different orders in relation to time to different entrepreneurs and it can be assumed that “the randomness” of such identity construction paths communicate the overall uniqueness of events along the life path.

The data showed that narrative identities are very much driven by personal desires and mental processes making sense of the circumstances, coming out as certain actions and decisions. The identities are thus constructed throughout the journey as the international entrepreneurs make sense of challenging experiences

in relation to both personal and professional life. Such events and circumstances create attitudes and orientation, sometimes even feelings, which adapt to the surrounding environment and reflect the membership of a certain community, culture or a personal desire. These reflections of identity underline the internal and external factors that result as international entrepreneurship. The stronger and numerous the experiences or events of international and entrepreneurial orientation in life, the more one is bound to identify oneself with the international and entrepreneurial orientation. One makes sense of the experiences by the identification and by internally and externally justifying certain actions and decisions made through the life journey.

Like mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, international entrepreneurship research has needed a larger emphasis put on the entrepreneurial perspective (Keupp & Gassmann 2009; Mainela et al 2014) as well as individual citation (Dawson & Henley 2012). As a contribution to such demand, the methodological approach of this research enabled a more thorough individual perspective onto finding meaningful experiences and events guiding into international entrepreneurship. Also, narratives were found highly useful in order to acknowledge the entrepreneur (the individual) in the middle of everything, not overriding the personal aspects of international entrepreneurship with a heavy organizational perspective. Though narratives serve as a rich source for insights over the phenomena, it is notable that e.g. the exact time of inception of international entrepreneurship remains in the dark. Narratives in general fail to give factual recording of the past as they are only interpreted representations of memorable events and experiences (Riessman 1993; Riessman 2008).

One of the findings contributing to the international entrepreneurship research is that being “internationally entrepreneurially oriented” or being an “international entrepreneur” means initially more than just making strategic decisions or following an organizational process of internationalization in order to reach foreign markets. While the foundational international entrepreneurship research (Oviatt & McDougall 1994) has conceptualized the INV theories and internationalization theories and focused on the rather organizational aspects of the entrepreneurial firms (Covin & Miller 2014; Etemad 2004; Mejri & Umemoto 2010), the findings of this research suggest that international entrepreneurship is much in relation to the individual. Being an international entrepreneur depends much on the experiences, both personal and social, affecting the identity construction in the long run.

Roughly said, one ends up being an international entrepreneur by having the internal desire grown into the identity and by adapting to external environment of change and opportunities. Meaningful in becoming international an entrepreneur are the actions and decisions one makes individually based on the environmental and circumstantial as well as social surroundings. In my own eyes, international entrepreneurship combines all of the presented identity typologies. As an international entrepreneur, one is more likely to be a passionate Explorer of the world, a Pioneer going through the unexplored international opportunities and a Seeker for an extended global “playground” to do business in. All of these

other three identity types combined with the receptive “born global” international orientation of The Native, may take one far into international entrepreneurship.

After finding these dimensions of the construction process of an international entrepreneurial identity, it would be interesting to go on researching the dimensional aspects more profoundly. As a master’s thesis, this research process was limited by time, data and thorough theoretical groundings and therefore one cannot assume the findings to cover these dimensions in more detail. Therefore, for future research suggestions I have identified the need for a more thorough research base on each identity construction, exploring possible other identities or other kinds of paths international entrepreneurs have taken. Also, one may need to look closer into distinct logical choices by which international entrepreneurs receive their value and advantage.

Societal importance and managerial implications

If it is so that international entrepreneurship requires a different mindset and approach in order to flourish, we need more understanding on how to support the community of international entrepreneurs as they go on pursuing international business. Though entrepreneurship and internationalization processes have been noticed to be somewhat similar, we cannot expect international entrepreneurs to be facing the same challenges domestic entrepreneurs are dealing with or, on the contrary, the challenges that larger firms face when they start internationalizing their operations. Being internationally entrepreneurial is a different story. And according to the findings of this study, there are differences between the international entrepreneurs as well. Therefore, the governmental as well as private sector offering guidance, support and assistance in international entrepreneurship and international venturing of micro-sized firms must acknowledge the differences between these groups and international entrepreneurs. Offering more of customized support and help for different types of international entrepreneurs could lead us into more effective and efficient international venturing, benefitting the whole community of young and vital generation of entrepreneurs.

Moreover, if international entrepreneurship is not only about an entrepreneur strategically taking a business into new international markets, but actually reflects more of a lengthy process forming the identity, I would encourage such international owner-managers to take a pause and reflect one’s story for a moment. It might become useful to narrate the personal story of international entrepreneurship in order to identify oneself within the international business community and find true value of what one is actually doing. As identities in general, the international entrepreneurial identity may gain new dimensions as time goes by. Hence, it could be almost therapeutic for an entrepreneur to reflect on one’s personal desires, dreams and growth or even the challenging circumstances every once in a while. “The only thing that is constant is change”, and therefore looking back at things, recalling experiences and reminding oneself of what is important may lead into a healthier and whole perspective over one’s international entrepreneurship.

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