

# Am I a Student and/or Entrepreneur?

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*Document Version*

Accepted author manuscript

*Published in:*

Education + Training

*DOI:*

[10.1108/ET-09-2014-0122](https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-09-2014-0122)

*Publication date:*

2017

*License*

Unspecified

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Nielsen, S. L., & Gartner, B. (2017). Am I a Student and/or Entrepreneur? Multiple Identities in Student Entrepreneurship. *Education + Training*, 59(2), 135-154. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-09-2014-0122>

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# Am I a Student and/or Entrepreneur?: Multiple Identities in Student Entrepreneurship

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Journal article (Accepted manuscript)

**CITE:** Am I a Student and/or Entrepreneur? Multiple Identities in Student Entrepreneurship. / Nielsen, Suna Løwe; Gartner, Bill . In: *Education + Training*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 2017, p. 135-154.

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DOI: [10.1108/ET-09-2014-0122](https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-09-2014-0122)

Uploaded to [CBS Research Portal](#): January 2019

## Introduction

There can be little doubt that entrepreneurship education often challenges students to explore a new possible identity, being the identity of entrepreneur. While there recently has been a growing emphasis on that entrepreneurship education serves as an important space for identity work (Harmeling 2011; Hytti and Heinonen, 2013; Fanton and Berry, 2014), this literature is still sparse considering the well-established and deep link between learning and identity development (Wenger, 1998). Identity is not a common issue in research on entrepreneurship education (Donnellon et al. 2014). Based on a literature review, Ollila (2012) concludes that entrepreneurship research has so far failed to sufficiently link identity construction and entrepreneurship education.

With the aim of creating greatly engaged and passionate students of entrepreneurship, we aim to examine students' entrepreneurial identity formation. After all, according to Ollila and Middleton (2013) and Donnellon et al. (2014) identity might be just as important as pedagogy and content, knowledge and skills, for successful entrepreneurship education. Ryan (2000) argue that in particular intrinsic motivation holds a central role in learning achievement, and Murnieks et al. (2014) highlights links between passion and identity centrality. Engaged students are highly required due to the complex and challenging content of entrepreneurship education (Balan and Metcalfe, 2010) that tend to push students outside their comfort zone, as it often is the case in management education in general (Dean and Jolly, 2012).

Recent identity research has in particular been centred around the impact of existing entrepreneurship education on students' identity construction (Harmeling 2011; Hytti and Heinonen, 2013; Donnellon et al., 2014); the identity transition from student to graduate (Holmes, 2015); or graduate entrepreneurship as an identity formation process (Hannon et al., 2005; Hegarty and Jones, 2008; Nabi and Holden, 2008; Nabi et al., 2010). We will argue however there exist theoretical and empirical gaps within the domain of student entrepreneurship, defined as students that explore the possible identity of entrepreneur by initiating and developing a business alongside their university studies. Our research provides a starting point for understanding the multiple identity processes involved in negotiating between the two identities of 'student' and 'entrepreneur', both demanding in time, effort and commitment. The assumption underlying our research is that insights into the multiple identity work of student entrepreneurs provide us with new important insights into the design of entrepreneurship education. Since entrepreneurship education tends to open for entrepreneurial identity exploration, we have to understand how this identity formation plays, positively and negatively, with the student identity formation in order to offer students the most effective entrepreneurial learning experience. Vanevanhoven and Liguori (2013) put it this way: 'By more fully understanding the process that help and hinder students as they struggle to become entrepreneur, we can better design curriculum to meet their ever-changing needs (pp. 324).

Theoretically we take our lead in multiple identity theory. First, we present interlinks between students entrepreneurship and identity. We hereafter review relevant literature on multiple identity formation and create a framework for analysing student entrepreneurial becoming. Ten illustrative cases of student entrepreneurship built from narrative interview data demonstrate the applicability of the model. We finally discuss our finding's implications for entrepreneurship education.

## Student Entrepreneurship and Identity

A strong case can be made for that the process from student to student entrepreneur is under researched. Current discussion in relation to student entrepreneurship is dominated by a focus on the early phases of the student entrepreneurial process, analysing entrepreneurial intent among students (Krueger et al., 2000; Autio et al., 2001); effects of entrepreneurial education on students' entrepreneurial perceptions and skills (Collins et al., 2004; Peterman and Kennedy, 2003); and on attitudes and experiences of entrepreneurship (Jones and Jones, 2014); etc. The wider complexities, issues and processes of what are going on when students actually act as entrepreneurs, how they for instance convert intention into actual start-up activities, have seldom been studied (Nabi et al., 2006). Hannon (2005) notes it is of essential importance to produce more knowledge capturing the student entrepreneurial process as a whole, and also to develop further conceptual and theoretical ideas about this.

In those occasional instances where student entrepreneurial processes are studied, the literature tends to treat the student entrepreneurial transformation process in a linear way. The rationale seems to be that students start out as one thing, student, and then they become something else, entrepreneur, and it might be for this reason researchers tend to use the term 'graduate entrepreneurship' in preference to 'student entrepreneurship' (Hannon et al., 2005; Hegarty and Jones, 2008; Nabi and Holden, 2008; Nabi et al., 2010; Fenton and Barry, 2014). Graduate entrepreneurship suggests that entrepreneurship is something students simply pursue after graduation and not during their studies. In particular, the idea that students are both students and entrepreneurs at the very same has received less attention, and no conceptual frameworks capturing these complexities seem to exist. There is however little doubt that a relatively large proportion of university students initiate entrepreneurial activities alongside their studies, and constitute a resource to knowledge intensive innovation and economic development (Taatala, 2010).

Our choice of studying student entrepreneurs from the perspective of identity is not plucked out of the air. This perspective is particularly validated in the case of student entrepreneurship due to the typical age span of university students. Adolescence is one of the most active periods in life, in terms of identity work (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Berzonsky, 1989; Adamson & Lyxell, 1996; Moshman, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In particular, the university experience has been associated with a high degree of identity change among young people (Soenens, et al., 2005). Students' sense of 'Who I am' and 'Who I am going to become' (Moshman, 2005) is highly developed as they go through university education. Also, much attention has been devoted to interlinks between identity and learning which continuously is studied from different angles, such as students' disengagement (Dean and Jolly, 2012); meaning and motivation (Haggis, 2004); identity and learning negotiation (Badenhorst and Kapp, 2013).

Recently the ways entrepreneurship education plays an active part in student entrepreneurial identity construction have been studied (Hytti and Heinonen, 2013; Harmeling, 2011; Donnellon et al. 2014), including the role of mentors (Rigg and O'Dwyer, 2012) and the role of social learning which also brings the issue of identity in the limelight (Howorth et al. 2012). It is widespread believed that entrepreneurship can be taught, and thus an entrepreneurial response can be developed in students (Kuratko, 2005). So far, the modern university has developed not one, but many different educational approaches to teach students entrepreneurship, e.g. approaches focusing on action (Johannisson et al., 1998); reflective practitioners (Jack and Anderson, 1999); contingency planning (Honig, 2004); and design thinking (Nielsen and Storvang, 2015). In recent debates on entrepreneurship education there have been a growing concern regarding 'what works', and thus what is the impact of different teaching approaches on entrepreneurial intentions, skills, motivations and

behaviours. E.g. Farhangmehr and Goncalves (2016) find evidence of that entrepreneurship education does not improve students' motivation to become entrepreneurs, and Bell and Bell (2016) investigate the effectiveness of experimental learning in terms of entrepreneurship education. The literature on entrepreneurship education reflects a tendency to rely on the so-called 'about' and 'for' entrepreneurship courses that are aligned with the dominant academic learning approaches at universities (Robinson et al., 2016), although it is the 'through' course designs that seems to be most fruitful (Pittaway and Edwards, 2012). According to Robinson et al. (2016) the institutional structures of universities are dominated by classical academic logics that lead to an objectivist approach to learning. This learning approach gives little room to neither psychological aspects nor concepts such as action, reflection or experience seen as essential ingredients of contemporary entrepreneurship education (Hägg and Kurczewska, 2016). This evolves in a discussion of whether or not, and how, it is possible for universities to produce good students and at the same time give room for students entrepreneurial becoming (Robinson et al., 2016). Our results contribute to this discussion.

## The Multiple Identity Perspective

To take on the identity of 'entrepreneur' may, indeed, be to take on any number of other identities, and to be entrepreneurial, may then be a form of identity construction. Recent contributions in entrepreneurship research also point this out and tie the entrepreneurial process to the identity discussion and vice versa (Down, 2006; Jain et al., 2009; Hoang and Gimeno, 2008; Phillips et al., 2013; Sarasvathy, 2008; Shepherd and Haynie, 2009). We define identity as the individual's sense of self in a setting (Weick, 1995), and each individual sense him- or herself in multiple ways accordingly to the heterogeneous social settings the individual participate in (Mead, 1934). A person has typically many social identities, roles and memberships, and studies of this multifaceted reality are essential to deeply understand individuals, processes and their outcomes (Ramarajan, 2014). An emphasis on multiple identities is important to entrepreneurship. After all, emerging entrepreneurs do not just sense themselves as entrepreneurs, they may also sense themselves as parents, artists, students, scientists, retired, etc. In addition, the entrepreneurial identity in itself confronts the individual with multiple tasks, sales, finance, marketer, etc., which may as well influence the sense of 'Who am I?' Processes of transition, such as student entrepreneurship, are generally acknowledged to result in multiple agendas, since new and old somehow bump into each other (Hatch and Schultz 2004), and in this process one can expect students to experiment with novel provisional selves that guides possible but not so far completely articulated professional identities (Ibarra, 1999). While any student holds multiple social identities and likely experiment with more than one possible self, these identities probably vary in significance in terms of the student's sense of self.

We are primarily inspired by constructivist views on identity. More or less all constructivist views on identity in one way or another highlight identity as developed from the interactions between intra-individual negotiation processes and outer oriented inter-subjective forces that take the context into consideration (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959; Weick, 1995; Jenkins, 2004; Ybena et al., 2009). While the intra-individual forces concern the individual student entrepreneur's inner negotiation process of constructing a meaningful story of 'who am I?', the inter-subjective dimension of identity building takes into account the multiple institutional contexts, and positions the self with reference to the heterogeneous processes of social interaction (Mead, 1934). In the following, we therefore provide a rough division between the intra-individual and inter-individual dimension of multiple identities in order to clarify our presentation of the theoretical frame of the article.

## Multiple identities and the intra-individual dimension

To understand how individuals negotiate among multiple identities and interact with themselves at an intra-individual level, Hoang and Gimeno (2007) explain entrepreneurial transition based on the configuration of entrepreneurial role identity. The aspects, novelty, conflict, complexity and centrality, of the role identity decide whether the entrepreneurial transition from a work role towards a founder role turns out to be a success or not. It follows from their ideas that students' difficulties in developing an entrepreneurial identity is related to: how novel this identity is (in terms of competences, knowledge, network, etc.) in comparison with the existing student identity; the degree to which the entrepreneurial identity contradicts the student identity; the complexity of the entrepreneurial identity experience; and how central the student perceives the entrepreneurial identity for his or her sense of self. The more central and integrated the sense of an entrepreneurial identity is in the student's sense of self, then the more motivated and entrepreneurially persistent the student can be assumed to be. Murnieks et al. (2014) suggest that multiple identity theories in general can be divided into two complementary hierarchies, being centrality (the importance an individual attaches to some sort of focal identity in the light of other identities) and salience (the readiness an individual hold to act out an identity). Studying how organisations' and leaders' cope with multiple identities, Pratt and Foreman (2000) overall put forward that multiple identities can be managed by either altering the amount of multiple identities, identity plurality, or the relationships among the identities, identity synergy. As a result they find four managerial responses, being deletion, compartmentalization, integration, and aggregation.

Another significant piece of work by Shepherd and Haynie (2009) theorise about the entrepreneurial identity role as a core that satisfies the individual psychological need for distinctiveness. At the same time, the entrepreneur also needs to belong to a larger social whole. The focus of this work is on the strategies utilised by entrepreneurs to optimise the balance between psychological belonging and distinctiveness in the entrepreneurial process, to prevent the loss of the individual self, whilst simultaneously remaining a member of a social community. They argue that entrepreneurs, as a group, choose to apply certain strategies due to some sort of identity core that needs to be different and yet also to belong, and through this they classify the entrepreneurial identity. Thus, student entrepreneurs can be expected to struggle with creating a balance between an emerging individual entrepreneurial identity that to various degrees stands out from the logic, role expectations and values of the university on one hand, and a student identity that is an institutionalised identity of the university to such a degree that it is a representative of its logic on the other hand. Student entrepreneurs may talk about this struggle as paradoxes, tensions or conflicts between the identities of 'student' and 'entrepreneur'. This has to be seen from the perspective of universities historically hold extensive institutional knowledge of how to develop employees (engineers, doctors, managers, etc.). In contrast, they may hold less knowledge of how to develop an entrepreneurial response in the student (Mayhew et al., 2016).

## Multiple identities and the inter-individual dimension

Although Shepherd and Haynie (2009) talk about the entrepreneur's need to belong to a larger social whole, their ideas still represent an individual-focused view of identity. They pay little attention to the social and institutional interactive forces that take part in shaping the individual identity, which also again shapes these forces back (Lok, 2010; Thornton et al., 2012). The identity perspective is pointed out as a way to bridge micro and macro analysis in entrepreneurship (Down and Reveley, 2004; Downing, 2005), which is a very important bridge to build in terms of studying student entrepreneurship. Young people, and thus the typical university student, can be assumed to be identity-confused (Erikson, 1968), and thus they are likely to be identity explorers who do not know who they are, and who they would like to become. They rely to a great extent on social

interaction, significant others, and institutional clues to provide input to, who they are and want to become (Adams et al., 2005; McLean, 2005). In particular, students can be expected to rely on the university institution within which they are associated. Universities represent strong institutional contexts (Bourdieu, 1988), which are “...designed to transform individuals” (Hjorth, 2003: 645) through educational activities (curriculum, exams, etc.) and social interaction (student/faculty interactions, friends, etc.) (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For instance, Falck et al. (2012) find that having an entrepreneurial peer group has positive effect on students’ entrepreneurial intentions. All this places universities in a key position in theories of identity sense-making and change among university students (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005).

Thus, student entrepreneurial identity sense-making is closely linked to institutional processes, which play out in their self-perception. At the same time, student entrepreneurs may also be seen as institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana et al., 2009; Tracey et al., 2011) who, through their actions, speak back to the university context and may even take part in changing this context. The constructivist identity perspective can support the development of a more multi-level insight into student entrepreneurship. As afore-mentioned, it conceptualises identity as a dual process of constant negotiation between the inner unique self-understanding and the organised inter-subjective meanings of the external environment. The inner sense of self can result in acts of disintegration from the context on those occasions where the individual does not feel that this self is compatible and comfortable with the context. Thus, the student entrepreneur may break with the expectations of the university context, and this context may at the same time try to resist the student entrepreneurial change if this change breaks with what the retention of existing orders requires. The output can be contradictions and tensions in the process from student to student entrepreneur. Yet it follows from constructivist identity theory that students most of the time can be expected to act accordingly to logics of context integration, and not disintegration (Mead, 1934). The individual adapts to the organised meanings, habits, routines, and predefined identities (lawyer, student, teacher, etc.) that reveal themselves in institutions. In any process of making sense of ‘who am I’ the students, consciously or unconsciously, takes into account these meanings. This leads Downing (2005) to look at the co-production of individual and collective identity in entrepreneurship.

## A framework of Multiple Identity

From the above literature review we extract a framework, a sort of sense-making map, which can be used to comprehend and discuss the nuances of ‘student’ and ‘entrepreneur’. The framework is somehow our ‘boxed-in’ and oversimplified interpretation of multiple identity construction in student entrepreneurship. It is not our intent to classify the complex multiple identity processes of student entrepreneurship but rather to highlight different aspects and forces that play a role in the constant internal and social contextual negotiation that takes place within students in the exploration of the possible identity of entrepreneur.

At an intra-individual level, Pratt and Foreman (2000) talk about multiple identities in terms of degree of identity plurality, which may be associated with the concepts of identity salience and identity centrality that are being highlighted by Murnieks et al. (2014). We expect student entrepreneurs, to differing extents, try to act out a single central identity ‘student or entrepreneur’, and thus keep one of the two identities salient, or to embrace more equally multiple identities ‘student and entrepreneur’ in the process of exploring the entrepreneurial identity. It follows that our framework presents one continuum from low (student or entrepreneur) to high (student and entrepreneur) identity plurality.

Another relevant continuum we find worth highlighting in our framework is the one of university integration-disintegration which is linked to the inter-individual level. It is inspired by the work of Mead (1934). Occasions of

high university integration is characterized by that the identities of 'student' and/or 'entrepreneur' are highly organized and attuned with the logics, values and shared goals of the university context. In contrast, occasions of university disintegration is associated with that the identities of 'student' and/or 'entrepreneur' are in conflict with the university context, and hostile attitudes and actions towards this context may arouse as a result. By including this in the framework we take account of the context in which the internal-oriented act of multiple identity construction is embedded, and thereby Shepherd and Haynie (2009) excellent thoughts on the challenge of balancing psychological belonging and distinctiveness in the entrepreneurial identity process becomes central.

When the two continuums are combined they provide four cells of a framework in which the different constructed themes of student entrepreneurial identity sense-making can be placed (Figure 1).

Insert figure 1

The themes of 'identity following' and 'identity differentiating' essentially deal with ways students integrate an emerging entrepreneurial identity with the university context. In identity following, the integration is performed by squeezing the entrepreneurial identity into the student identity and thus into the logic of the university. In other words, the entrepreneurial identity is to a high extent kept salient, and the student identity is primarily acted out (low identity plurality). Slightly different, university integration is reached by differentiating the identities of 'student' and 'entrepreneur' i.e. identity differentiation (high identity plurality). Both identities are acted out to ensure psychological belonging to the context, but by differentiating the two identities the complexity, the issue underlined by Hoang and Gimeno (2007), of the comprising of the multiple identities of 'student' and 'entrepreneur' is expected to be lowered. A typical example of identity differentiation could be time differentiation. The student entrepreneur acts out the student identity when engaged in the university work, and the entrepreneurial identity is acted out in his or hers spare time.

'Identity devouring' and 'identity expansion' reflect situations of students whose intra-individual self-concept is highly related to entrepreneurship in such a way that they, in those cases the university institution somehow resists entrepreneurial change, end up by disintegrating from the university context. In 'identity devouring' the act of university disintegration is the result of the students being devoured by the entrepreneurial identity. The entrepreneurial identity is in other words very central to the student's sense of self, and it is acted out at the expense of the student identity that is kept more or less salient (low identity plurality). Occasions of 'identity expanding' refer to student entrepreneurs who constantly try to be everything to everyone and every context (high identity plurality). The main focus is which identity is useful in which situation. This way of negating the identities 'student' and 'entrepreneur' can be seen as acts of what Goffman (1959) refers to as impression management or what Hatch and Schultz (2002) refer to as hyper-adapting. As we see it, it also reflects postmodern thinking of identity in which the individuals are expected to be so flexible that they are in a constant state of flux, constantly making new combinations of identities in parallel with switching frameworks (Rattansi and Phoenix, 1998). We associate identity expanding with disintegrative forces. A too fluid and constantly changeable sense of self makes it hard for the student entrepreneur to focus as student or entrepreneur.



## Ten Illustrative cases

Previously completed empirical work on student entrepreneurial identity formation is applied to illustrate our conceptual framework. In order to set the record straight our aim is not to test the framework using the ten cases or to build new theory from the cases. We have presented our theoretical framework and constructs, and in this section we illustrate the framework in order to provide the reader concrete examples of how the constructs reveal themselves in the real life of student entrepreneurs. According to Siggelkow (2007) it is valuable to employ case illustration to get closer to and understand the rich everyday details and paradoxes of theoretical constructs.

While the data is nearly a decade old it is still useful to illustrate the framework and provide important inputs to contemporary discussions about entrepreneurship education. The main reason is that universities are still today being viewed as institutional structures which through their logics and isomorphic forces tend to primarily prepare students for the job market and less for becoming entrepreneurs. Since the 1970s, universities have become increasingly oriented towards entrepreneurship (e.g. a growing number of universities offer various entrepreneurship courses, majors, certificates, graduate programmes, and more than 600 universities globally have entrepreneurship centres and different kinds of entrepreneurship institutions (Morris et al., 2013). Many universities around the globe have without doubt taken enormous and important steps towards incorporating entrepreneurship and innovation into their activities (Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Burnett, 2005; Denman, 2005; Chanphiom and Peter, 2014) along with that they have been pushed to be a part of 'triple helix' constellations rather than being isolated ivory towers (Murphy, 2011). As a consequence a lot of new questions about how to teach entrepreneurship education have been asked (Mayhew et al., 2016), and longitudinal data-driven insights into what impact students' entrepreneurial transformation have been generated and tested (Vanevenhoven and Liguori, 2013). Nevertheless, a strong case can be made for that many universities have not yet succeeded in incorporating entrepreneurship into the core of their institutional structures and logics (Mayhew et al., 2016). An important explanation may be that university institutions can be characterized as slow-moving institutions (Roland, 2004). They are embedded in long historical roots characterized by strong academic social norms, values, and principles that do not perish that easy (Bourdieu, 1988). Clayton and Eyving (2011) support this statement: 'In the spirit of honouring tradition, universities hang on to past practices to the point of imperilling their futures. When reduced budgets force them to cut costs, they trim but rarely make hard tradeoffs. Nor do they readily reinvent their curricula to better prepare students for the increasing demand of the world of work' (pp. xxii). We will thus argue that the university that existed at the time that the empirical work was completed is in many ways the university that exists today. The ten student entrepreneurial cases are still relevant illustrations of the multiple identity complexities involved in student entrepreneurship.

A narrative methodology has been applied in order to construct the ten cases of student entrepreneurship that illustrate our framework. The ways in which entrepreneurial individuals' make sense of 'Who I am' can be understood through the concept of narrative (Down, 2006). The interview guide is originally designed to capture the student entrepreneurial process in general. But, the ten students talk continuously about their identities, and thus the struggles and paradoxes of making sense of self in times of entrepreneurial transformation.

The ten student entrepreneurs have all, in parallel with or as a part of their university studies, initiated and worked actively on creating a new company alone or together with other individuals. Furthermore, they are Master's level students from the same Scandinavian University. Five of the students have a business education background, and the other five have an engineering background. Looking at how the entrepreneurial identity at first was triggered within the realities of the students, half of the ten students talk about the triggering as an

inner process of awakening taken place prior to their entrepreneurial action. They have more or less always sensed themselves as entrepreneurs or at least had a desire to become one. The remaining five students narrate about the entrepreneurial beginning as a reactive process unfolding from their everyday interactions and work as students. First slowly over time the entrepreneurial identity became a part of their sense of self. All ten students receive the Danish state's educational grant.

To overcome the rationalised pictures of narrating, to gain further insights into the research topic, and to validate the findings from the first interview, the research was added two longitudinal snapshots of student entrepreneurship. The students were thus interviewed twice, with a one-year gap, during 2005 and 2006. The duration of each interview was one to two hours, and the interviews were semi-structured and aimed at producing story telling in preference to question-responses (Johansson, 2004). Table 1 provides a factual overview of the ten storytellers. We have changed the names of the student entrepreneurs from reasons of anonymity.

Insert table 1

In order to capture the continuum university integration-disintegration of our framework, the ten student entrepreneur stories go through a framing process (Abbott, 2002; Boje, 2001). Inner and outer framing methodology is applied (Pettigrew, 1997). The former refers to the stories in themselves provide insights into those institutional university processes that have been internalised in the students' realities. The outer framing involves further story collection through interviews, surveys, and document studies. In terms of outer framing, we interviewed 14 respondents (supervisors, developers and administrators of entrepreneurship education; the rector; researchers engaged in spinout projects; and previous student entrepreneurs) all being a part of the Scandinavian university. We also collected documents that reveal the history, culture, directives, strategies, etc. of the university. 158 pages of fully transcribed interviews are the empirical material that this paper takes as its point of departure.

Setting the scene for our study, the Scandinavian university was established in 1974. It applies a didactics philosophy that combines the conventional academic model and the problem-based learning model. This philosophy dominates all three faculties, social science; humanities; and engineering, science and medicine. All students work in groups and carry out project work targeted at solving real-life problems. The university had approximately 13.000 students in 2006 and hired its first entrepreneurship professor in 1997. From 2000-2006, entrepreneurship courses began to emerge in all three faculties. In 2005 and 2006, the strategy underlined the university's goal of becoming one the leading universities in Europe in the field of entrepreneurship. However, many of the entrepreneurial activities offered by the university are extra-curriculum activities. In 2006, the university offers two kickstarter courses (business plan and mentoring courses for entrepreneurial students); different events and seminars (e.g. patenting seminar, innovation camps); a creativity laboratory; Venture Cup competition; three student incubators; 12 academic courses in entrepreneurship across the three faculties; two international master degrees in entrepreneurship; and one knowledge exchange office working with innovation and entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, approximately 75% of all students at the university have not been presented to entrepreneurship as an alternative career route in 2006. Increase in entrepreneurial activity for students and staffs are still a part of the universities strategy for 2016-2021.

The ten student entrepreneurs participating in our study have to various degrees been involved in the above-mentioned entrepreneurial activities offered by the Scandinavian university. Peter, Thomas, Michael and Brian have not participated in any of the activities. Jens and Esben have been enrolled in one of the academic entrepreneurial courses. Anne, Morten and Mads have participated in one of the Kickstarter courses, and the same is the case with Alexander, who also was enrolled in an academic entrepreneurship course.

## The Framework, Illustrated

### **‘Student’ and ‘entrepreneur’ is not a bed of Roses**

Before we begin to illustrate our framework through the ten student entrepreneurs’ stories, first some words about the one theme that overshadows every one of the student entrepreneurs’ stories. The theme is basically that the transformation from student to student entrepreneur is a highly challenging process. In line with Hoang and Gimeno (2007) one important explanation is the dissimilarity between how entrepreneurial identity and student identity are experienced. Mads expresses it this way: *“I expect it to be a long and hard journey to change my role from student to entrepreneur. The academic way of thinking and the entrepreneurial one are two completely different things. In our academic work, there is no room for commercialisation. It is a remark on the side. There are methodologies and rules to follow, and if you deviate you have to explain why”*. Student identity is an inherent part of the university context, thus the student entrepreneurs’ stories deal with how the students fabricate an unknown entrepreneurial identity in relation to the institutional discourses of the university, which, according to the students, leave little room for entrepreneurship. As a consequence, the stories are infused with the frustrations of making sense of an entrepreneurial identity when the familiar student identity, provides few guiding clues for how to construct an entrepreneurial identity. Mads continues: *“We are completely new in this area. To start a new company is like moving into a new world. I am an engineer. For me everything has to be systematic and logical. But what is going on is widely chaotic and totally confusing.”* The novelty combined with the lack of guiding clues results in the entrepreneurial identity being experienced as uncertain.

A second and overall theme in the student entrepreneurs’ stories, also in line with Hoang and Gimeno (2007), deals with the difficulties of incorporating the entrepreneurial identity within the established and familiar student identity, due to incompatibility between the two identities. Michael explains: *“To be both an entrepreneur and a student is the art of juggling with two incompatible balls. The first ball is on the low-practical level. It is about the moment. It is about everyday life. The other is up in the helicopter perspective. It is about structuring a project, theory, and absorptions.”* The student identity focuses on learning how to apply, evaluate and test theories; it is determined by a pre-defined award system and curriculum set by the university, and it is an entry ticket into the existing job market. The aim of the student identity is to prepare for employment. In contrast, the student entrepreneurs identify entrepreneurial identity, to a great extent, as being associated with practice and creating an unknown desirable future from effectuation.

Thus, the student entrepreneurs in general, find themselves in a tense and conflicting situation between the old prominent view and a new, emerging, entrepreneurial identity. The above illustrates that the tensions involved with the construction of the student entrepreneurial identity are not only a matter of individual development, but are also highly influenced by the institutional university context. To move from student to student entrepreneur is to distance oneself from an integrated social self and move towards a, some extent, isolated

self. The entrepreneurial identity is experienced as something unique and differentiated from the general student body.

However, at the same time, the narrative material shows numerous signs that the combination of 'student' and 'entrepreneur' gives rise to positive synergies. The strong attachment of the student entrepreneurs to the university context offers unique opportunities in terms of access to knowledge, advanced equipment, resources, etc. Moreover, the freedom and flexibility associated with being a student gives room for the entrepreneurial experiment: the educational grant (in Scandinavia) decreases the economic risk linked to the student entrepreneurial process, and the opportunity cost is low, since students are used to getting a minimum income and do not need to earn a lot of money. Finally, besides being a 'student' and 'entrepreneur' they experience a relatively low identity complexity. At this stage of their lives they are typically not fathers, husbands, or house owners. Yet, the positive angles of being a 'student' and 'entrepreneur' are nevertheless not the main focus on the stories. It is on the tensions of combining the two identities that the emerging student entrepreneurs mainly focus in their story telling.

## The Four Framework Themes

The four themes of our framework deals with different ways students make sense of joining the two identities of 'student' and 'entrepreneur'. Fragments of the themes (identity devouring, identity following, identity expanding, and identity differentiating) are found in most of the ten student entrepreneurial identity stories, but the different themes are combined in different ways in the ten stories and they also to a high extent vary in terms of importance. For illustrative reasons, we in the following highlight those of the student entrepreneurs' stories, which most closely reflect the four themes.

**Identity devouring:** Anne, age 26, student of International Business Economics. Her student entrepreneurial story is basically about studenthood escape. Since her childhood she has perceived herself as an entrepreneurial individual, who belongs in the world of business. During an internship in Spain she created the business idea of offering SMEs a specific internationalisation package. She also began acting as an entrepreneur, and began to feel less in-tune with the university context. Her entrepreneurial activities were a way of breaking out from the university milieu, which she saw as something that was stifling her. The university was a homogenising jungle, or lock-in structure, that promotes employment career routes, leaving little room for her entrepreneurial identity. She felt that she had to increase her personal distance from the university and focus on what really matters – to work and make a difference. She explains her escape from studenthood thus: *"The way I see myself is like a person, who was a little bit tired of being student, and then I believed I sort of could escape from being a student... and begin to focus on entrepreneurship, and in this way to get the feeling that I had moved on"*. Although she expressed a hostile attitude towards the university context, she did not completely break away from it. In fact, she hid her entrepreneurial activities from fellow students, teachers, etc. *"It is a little bit burdensome, because you are the only one in the class, whose desire is to become an entrepreneur. Somehow it makes you a little bit strange. It is not something you shout and scream about"*.

In this way, Anne was so eager to be an entrepreneur that she was devoured by this identity to the extent that the student identity was gradually silenced. However, at the same time, Anne also had a need to belong to what she refers to as the homogenising jungle of the university and thus she disguised her entrepreneurial activities from this context. Esben and Jens also talked a good deal about identity devouring and disguising. These students, in particular, tended in an almost self-absorptive way, to let the entrepreneurial sense-making take control. It should be noted that these students also expressed that they had had an inner desire to become an

entrepreneur for a very long time, and thus this identity was central to their sense of self. Through acts of disintegration these student entrepreneurs lost their connection to the university context and the synergies of combining 'student' and 'entrepreneur', and this presented drawbacks in terms of realising their entrepreneurial career dreams. However, they saw it as necessary to step out from the university context to succeed as entrepreneurs. The fact that they did not step out completely can be explained by a need to belong (Shepherd and Haynie, 2009). They hid their entrepreneurial activities in order to keep belonging to this context. In fact, they acted as a minority group within the university who believed that they would be confronted with less tension and higher approval within the university context if they concealed their entrepreneurial identity.

**Identity following:** Morten, age 26, student of Civil Engineering. His student entrepreneurial story shows a journey within academia. The focus of a group project, the final thesis, was to develop a method to measure acceleration of larger offshore constructions, which can result in major savings on inspections for the offshore industry. It was, however the supervisor, himself an academic entrepreneur, that convinced the group about the entrepreneurial potential of the method. Morten, did not dream of becoming an entrepreneur, but he was curious. When the students had submitted the thesis the supervisor advised them to go out and find a job. He would look for investors to convert the method into an entrepreneurial opportunity. After a few weeks he contacted the students as he had found some business angels interested in investing. Morten and a fellow student were open to the idea, and they, in collaboration with the supervisor, initiated an entrepreneurial process that to a great extent unfolded through the academic networks of the supervisor. In general, the process followed the logic of academia: they even wrote scientific papers to market their method. Morten tells that the entrepreneurial process made little difference to their everyday lives: *"It was like we were just students. It was not as if it made a big difference during our education"*.

We extract from Morten's story an identity following sense-making process. In this process, the entrepreneurial identity is narrated as something that can be squeezed into the student identity and thus the entrepreneurial identity construction follows the logic of the university framework. Morten perceived himself primarily as a student carrying out entrepreneurial activities and not as an entrepreneur with studenthood as a side activity. While acting as entrepreneurs, he and the rest of his group continued doing and thinking as they always had done as students. In fact, he seemed absorbed in the technical aspects of their business idea and treated the tasks of business development as secondary. Identity following reflects identity sense-making, which in this case was highly institutionalised and thus integrated into the logic of the university. The entrepreneurial identity was adapted to the structures, meanings, and processes of the university context and intensified by the students' supervisor also supervising the entrepreneurial identity construction. The university context, in the guise of the supervisor, kept the student entrepreneurs within the institutionalised student identity category. The supervisor acted in accordance with the values for normal career transition within the university context when he advised the students to go out and find a job after graduating, rather than focusing on becoming entrepreneurs.

**Identity expanding:** The entrepreneurial process of Michael, age 27, studying international business economics, can best be seen as a story of hyper-Darwinism. Michael had always known he would end up as entrepreneur: entrepreneurship defines him. As a part of an internship programme he expanded the Icelandic host company's activities in Scandinavia. But he soon came to learn that becoming an entrepreneur is very hard and full of economic turmoil and stress. *"The best way I can explain it [entrepreneurship] is by comparing it to having five or fifteen theses going on at the same time (...) Last week, I worked 80 hours"*. With reference to Darwin and the theory of survival of the fittest, he talked about how he used chameleon skills to constantly adapt to various settings (student, sales man, entrepreneur, etc.). He was what the context required him to be, and this requirement constantly changed due to the multiple situations he constantly faced. Michael was constantly searching for new customers and projects to survive as an entrepreneur, which again reflects his dislike of

routine and love of the start-up atmosphere. The chameleon-like conduct means that Michael did everything he could to act both as student and entrepreneur, and whatever else, simultaneously. However, this life was stressful and had consequences for his success both as a student and an entrepreneur. As a student he had difficulties with focusing in-depth and developing academic work, and as an entrepreneur he also lacked focus and the ability to create long-lasting organisations.

In the framework we define this approach to student entrepreneurial identity sense-making as identity expanding. Michael wanted to embrace both identities, and the entrepreneurial development meant an expansion of the student identity. The identity expanding sense of self comes forward when Michael explains how he associates himself with a chameleon and that his strongest skills are his Darwinist capability of adaptation. His entrepreneurial process is characterised by constantly adapting to new projects and responding to various sets of different people. His story illustrates a stressed, fragmented and free-floating young student entrepreneur, who constantly explores with few supportive reference points, and who is trying to be everything for everybody. He is constantly chasing new projects, ideas and opportunities.

As seen from Michael's story, identity expanding students are in danger of ending up in a situation of university context disintegration. The high levels of activity involved in constantly shifting context and identities result in students losing their focus and being unable to perform as a full member in the university context. Combined with the desire to continuously start something new, the 'expanding' students distance themselves from any routines, and they have a hard time dealing with the rigidity of the university frame.

**Identity differentiating:** Thomas, age 27, is a civil engineering student. His combination of 'student' and 'entrepreneur' is captured under the heading 'time divider'. A company becomes interested in a product designed by students during a semester project and the students establish their own company, as this is the easiest way to sell the product to the interested company. In the process of business creation, through contact with their local public network, they become involved in the start-up of a local, design-focused incubator, Dreamhouse. *"We were sort of captured by the entrepreneurial spirit, as from the beginning we were a part of Dreamhouse (...) Thus, suddenly it was natural to give the company and our own ideas a chance"*. However, although the entrepreneurial spirit had captured the students, they were very concerned about how the entrepreneurial activities would affect their performance as students and whether it may be better to prepare for employment. *"The final years of your education confront you with a heavy workload, in particularly in regards to the final thesis. I think it is the hardest time during your education. Being in the start-up process is also one of the hardest periods of being an entrepreneur. Thus, I think that the combination of two things is too much. You may fail both places, and it would be annoying to end up with worse grades than you otherwise would have done"*. Therefore, Thomas made a decision: *"I prioritised being a student. Until you have a degree in your hands I do not think that you are completely done. Receiving this means that you get another perception of yourself. That was the way we thought. When you are done with your studies then you can begin to see yourself as an entrepreneur"*. It was, however, difficult to put the entrepreneurial activities on hold; customers do not want to wait until students have graduated.

Thomas sought to differentiate between the two identities in time, by waiting until after graduation to pursue his entrepreneurial development. His story is framed around an occupation where the workload is linked to being a student and entrepreneur. There is a possible negative influence on the performance of these individuals as "student," which he attempts to lower by differentiating the world of entrepreneurship from the world of student. The narrative material illustrates that identity differentiating is an act that tends to lead to university context integration, as these student entrepreneurs, through rational activities, make an effort to not disintegrate from the university, despite their entrepreneurial development. They work towards belonging to

the university context in an unaltered way. In doing so, these students take the student entrepreneurial situation as a whole into account in their sense-making processes, to find a meaningful and integrated solution to multiple identity positioning.

## Conclusion, Discussion, and Reflections

We can conclude that rather than emphasising the positive and synergetic aspects of the situation 'student' and 'entrepreneur', the student entrepreneurs foremost talk about fragmented selves, identity confusion, identity risk, identity concealment, work overload, stress and lack of transparency. They experience the university as a deterministic occupational structure that transforms students and makes them commit to a pre-defined, work-taker, identity. The potential of these young, future entrepreneurs is not fully exploited, and we can see from our second interviews with the student entrepreneurs that relatively few long-lasting organisations are the result. Students may end up toning down or abandoning either the student identity sense making or the entrepreneurial one, and as a result fulfilled neither their potential as entrepreneurs nor as students. An important explanation is that the Scandinavian university is not perceived as a 'safe' place to explore the entrepreneurial identity at the point in time of the data collection.

The tensions between 'student' and 'entrepreneur' make one question the desirability of accommodating entrepreneurship among students. Do we lose too much in the process? A great deal, however, speaks in favour of student entrepreneurship, and therefore we need to discuss how to make the university a safe - and also developing - place for student entrepreneurship? Overall, our research suggests, in line with Bécard and Grégoire (2005), that *'... education should allow for the personal development and autonomy of the individual who is being educated'* (p. 25). In fact, universities should to a much higher extent appreciate and take into account the identity related aspects of learning in designing learning activities. It is not enough for them to think solely in terms of curriculum building in a conventional sense when facilitating entrepreneurship among students. Learning can be seen as an opportunity for students to go through cognitive, experience-based and identity-related change, and this in particular can be expected from education *through* entrepreneurship and not just *about* or *for* entrepreneurship. However, if we design learning activities that students experience as a threat to their current sense of self (and/or possible self), they become disengaged students and spend time on defensive coping strategies (Dean and Jolly, 2012). These coping strategies are in many ways those we illustrate in our framework. Alignment between learning activity and students' sense of self is likely to result in engagement and positive adaptive learning loops (Dean and Jolly, 2012).

Our framework does unfortunately not provide an answer to how this type of alignment can be developed. The value of the framework is more to understand different ways students' negotiate between the identities of 'student' and 'entrepreneur' depending on, among other things, how central students' experience the entrepreneurial identity and institutional affiliation. Each way has positive and negative aspects attached, and some pathways are interestingly more university integrative than others. Universities have to be open to these various ways and thus recognise differences in shaping entrepreneurial identities. In this way, universities have to give students much more space to think about and legitimize their individual sense-making processes and opportunities to explore multiple future (job-taking and job-making) identities as an embedded part of the knowledge disseminating process. Otherwise some students end up as being disengaged and disintegrated. This suggests that universities must, to a far greater extent, view themselves as what Erikson (1968) referred to as psychological institutional moratoriums, and thus as platforms for identity exploration. Universities delay the commitments of adulthood, and this delay gives room for *'... playfulness on the part of youth'* (Erikson, 1968:

157). This is in line with that Robinson et al. (2016) mention the importance of that universities break with the tendency to be impersonal learning institutions transmitting knowledge to anonymous individual students.

To create a psychological institutional moratorium, universities have to break with the lock-in structures and embrace the idea of structure un-structuredness. Instead of homogenising, integrative and rigid structures, universities have to set up flexible structures that make room for students' ever-changing explorative stories of identity. Universities also have to consider how different configurations of their participation with 'student' and 'entrepreneur' can lead the identity formation streams of 'student' and 'entrepreneur' in different directions.

Looking into the learning literature on how to give room for identity experiments within curriculum, the term 'meaning-oriented learning' is valuable (Meijers, 2002). In meaning-oriented learning the student is confronted with real-life; actions and social interactions are stimulated, behavioural models and coaching are in focus, teachers are change coaches, the students are taught how to learn and they are provided with feedback in respect of their own individual development process. In many ways, it resembles the recommendations of how to design effective enterprising education (Jones and Iredale, 2010), which also call for more psychological and holistic learning approaches to entrepreneurship in higher education (Taatala, 2010). In general entrepreneurship teaching methods is often thought of as something that needs to be learning-centred (Balan and Metcalfe, 2012), and equally in meaning-oriented learning the individual is the starting point, not the curriculum. Learning is a social, interactive and individual development process. Looking into the student entrepreneurs' stories, they are setting up a meaning-oriented learning environment for themselves, yet, they lack coaching, familiar clues, etc. from the university that can support them in making a larger sense of what is happening to themselves, and what steps to take next. It points to an important role for universities to play. Also, although existent entrepreneurship education literature seems much aligned with meaning-oriented learning, it still needs to develop and further understand the psychological mechanism and conflicts associated with students' entrepreneurial identity construction. Based on this knowledge faculty and students can discuss the future development on entrepreneurship education (Donnellon et al., 2014). Our framework may be a way to start this discussion.

This study's emphasis on ten student entrepreneurs' stories set boundaries for generalisation. Enterprising individuals can be assumed to relate differently to their entrepreneurial self-image depending on their specific circumstances, age, world-view, experiences, knowledge, contexts and the set-up of the competing identities. It is our hope that this study will encourage others to engage in further investigation of multiple identities in student entrepreneurship and discuss the implications of the findings in terms of entrepreneurship education. One of the next steps might be to test our framework in different university contexts. It could be fruitful to obtain more knowledge about how different types of universities influence the identity processes of student entrepreneurs and the tensions linked hereto. In general we believe the multiple identity perspective gives us a rich language that brings multiplicity, individual sense-making, social interactions and the university context to the fore in student entrepreneurship research. Moreover, a language through which we can reach a more complicated, multi-level and richer view of the process from student towards student entrepreneur, and through which we can gain insight into many different alternate pathways towards student entrepreneurial failure or success. So far the literature that revolves around interlinks between student entrepreneurs, identity and university education seems very fragmented and based on different underlying assumptions of identity. Much more effort can be devoted to creating an overview of this literature.



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Figure 1: Multiple identities in student entrepreneurship

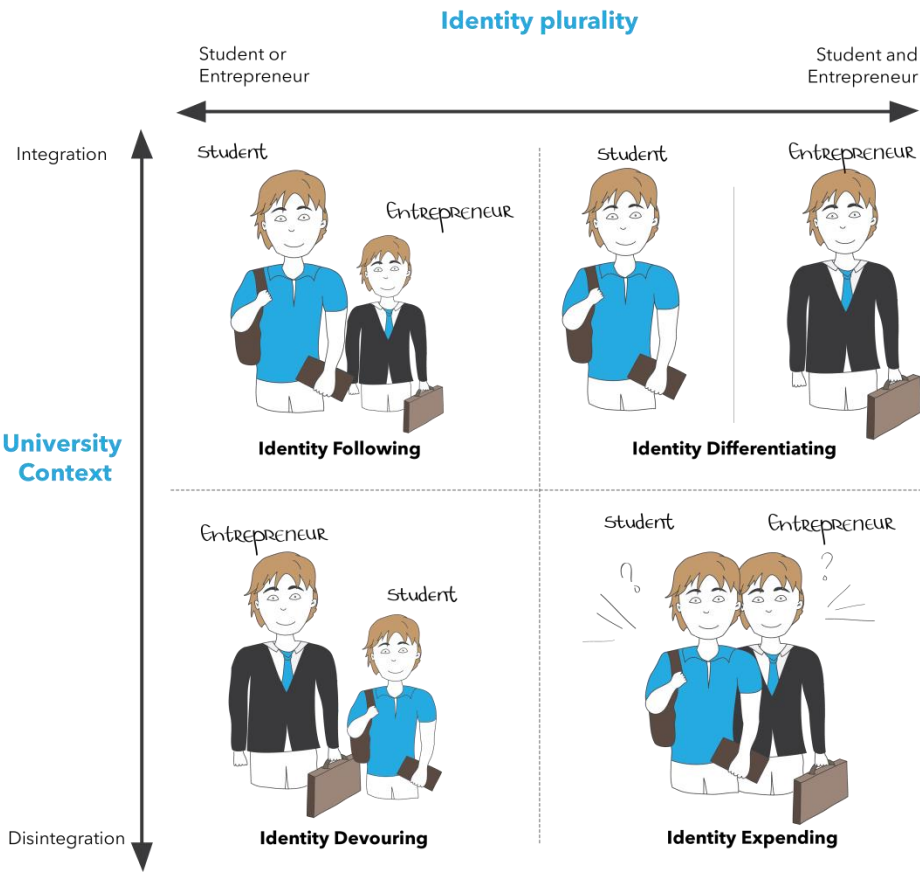


Table 1: Ten cases of student entrepreneurship

Student entrepreneur	Business (B) / engineering	Semester entrepreneurship is initiated	Business Idea	Still active one year after
Morten	E	10	System for analysis of offshore constructions	No
Alexander	E	8	Automatic self-monitoring system for home patients	Yes
Thomas	E	10	Design company	No
Jens	E	8	Different web sites offering different products for free	Yes
Mads	E	10	Adapting the concept of role play (the story-teller)	No
Esben	B	6	E-commerce and own shop: Import and sale of fitness products	Yes
Anne	B	9	Consultancy company: SMEs and internationalisation	Yes
Michael	B	9	Consultancy company: Online questionnaire survey/communication	Yes
Brian	B	8	Production of a new all-embracing TV-magazine	No
Peter	B	8	Production of a new line of fitness clothing in China	No