

6-13-2015

A TALE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF MICRO-IDENTITIES IN THE STORIES FOUNDERS TELL (SUMMARY)

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Recommended Citation

Kirk, Jessica (2015) "A TALE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF MICRO-IDENTITIES IN THE STORIES FOUNDERS TELL (SUMMARY)," *Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 16 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol35/iss16/13>

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≈ SUMMARY ≈

A TALE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF MICRO-IDENTITIES IN THE STORIES FOUNDERS TELL

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Principal Topics

Although many founders have multiple identities, these are often treated as potential sources of conflict, liabilities to be managed (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2001; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). Since founders are viewed as integral to the venture, the perception is that identities associated with anything other than the business are incongruent. This study offers a different perspective. Multiple, *micro-identities* are assets, or resources, for entrepreneurs (Phillips, Tracey, & Karra, 2013). Specifically, this paper views identity as a mechanism for building authentic relationships. Through carefully constructed identity narratives, successful entrepreneurs build relationships and shape perceptions of themselves and their firms (Navis & Glynn, 2010; Navis & Glynn, 2011; Phillips, Tracey, & Karra, 2013). Just as savvy networkers learn how to relate to different people and adapt to situations, entrepreneurs learn how to build targeted relationships. Founders may not always be explicitly aware of this, but the proposal here is that their identity as a founder, inventor, mother, father, community member, or environmentalist facilitate the development of relationships that help them gain support and shape perceptions of their firm.

Method

Given the limited theory for this approach, I used a qualitative, multiple-case study design (Eisenhardt, 1989). Open-ended interviews with several entrepreneurs provided clues for how identities of founders help them build relationships. This approach allowed me to better understand the intricate mechanisms that facilitate this process and provided a foundation for future studies.

Results and Implications

Results of the interviews provided clues as to *how* identities act as a mechanism for building relationships. Several of the entrepreneurs did, in fact, view identities as an asset. It was also revealed that the identities acted as “connectors” by providing shared experiences and even created path dependencies due to the relationships they facilitated.

The present study extends research on entrepreneurial identities and proposes that micro-identities are a resource for building relationships associated with a venture. Beyond providing a deeper understanding of how identities are a mechanism for this process, the results present a different perspective on multiple identities. Viewing identities as an asset taps into the value that exists in micro-identities and helps advance the field of entrepreneurship research.

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