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Sensemaking by minority entrepreneurs: role identities and linguistic embeddedness

Language, as a form of contextual embeddedness, often defines how entrepreneurs enact their role identities, as well as restrict, or enable, the scope of their entrepreneurial activities. This study is an analysis of the role of linguistic embeddedness and role identities in the actions of two groups of minority entrepreneurs: immigrants and native minorities. This analysis was done by looking at the sensemaking of entrepreneurial activities, including venture creation and development. In-depth interviews with eight Russian immigrants in Finland and seven Swedish-speaking Finns were analyzed through metaphor analysis. The results show that immigrant entrepreneurs negotiate multiple role identities when realizing entrepreneurial activities and that, because of insufficient linguistic embeddedness in the host country's context, native minority entrepreneurs face less complexity in enacting their role identities than their immigrant counterparts. This study contributes to the literature by focusing on the relatively underexplored interaction between the multiple role identities of an entrepreneur and organizational emergence and development. It also adds to the growing body of research on the role of language in entrepreneurship.

Keywords: minority entrepreneurship; sensemaking; linguistic embeddedness; role identity; entrepreneurial identity

1. Introduction

When looking at entrepreneurship, one must account for the factors that add to its complexity for immigrants and minorities within any country, as well as examining how they affect the entrepreneurial identity itself. For instance, due to limited employment opportunities, minority groups are more likely to become involved in entrepreneurial activities than majority populations (Dana 1997; Levie 2007; Kloosterman 2010; Joardar and Wu 2011). However, minority groups may have varied motivations for venture creation. Due to the presence of multiple role identities, linguistic restrictions, and a lack of social inclusion, minority entrepreneurs may face distinct challenges in establishing and maintaining the relationships that enable entrepreneurship (Stryker and Burke 2000; Aliaga-Isla and Rialp 2013; Yitshaki and Kropp 2016; Leitch and Harrison 2016; Wry and York 2017).

Minority entrepreneurs are often treated as being identical to their immigrant counterparts (Aliaga-Isla and Rialp 2013). However, several countries have native minority groups that differ from immigrants in terms of language. In this study, the impact of linguistic contextual embeddedness among native and immigrant minorities on entrepreneurial activities is explored. We seek to address the gap in entrepreneurship research on the interrelation between the macro and micro levels of analysis within the sphere of immigrant entrepreneurship (Dabić et al. 2020). By using the term “linguistic embeddedness,” we do not solely refer to minorities’ knowledge of the majority language of their country of residence.

Linguistic embeddedness has consequences for entrepreneurial actions, as it defines role identities and relationships that are relational and meaningful (Stryker and Burke 2000; Leitch and Harrison 2016). The language embedded in role identities impacts the choice of target market and access to suppliers, distributors, financial systems, and legal support. While start-up entrepreneurs suffer from the liability of newness (Stinchcombe 1965; Freeman, Carroll, and Hannan 1983), issues related to language and ethnicity can add to the complexities of creating a venture.

To study the role of language, two minorities in Finland are analyzed: (i) an immigrant minority, Russians, and (ii) a native minority, Swedish-speaking Finns. For the Swedish-speaking group, the country’s context, including the linguistic one, is known in detail. For the Russian group, everything, from the language to the legal system, is new. This study contributes to the minority entrepreneurship literature by focusing on both immigrant and native minorities. Except for studies in the US context, minority entrepreneurship studies have mostly been focused on immigrant entrepreneurs as the core minority or there has not been any differentiation between native minorities and immigrants despite their distinct features (see Bates et al. 2018). While some authors of entrepreneurship studies compare the motives and opportunity identification of native and immigrant entrepreneurs (e.g.,

Kushnirovich et al. 2018; Vinogradov and Jørgensen 2017), none of them consider native minorities a separate group within the “native population” category.

Contexts frame entrepreneurial activities and shape the outcomes of them; thus, sensemaking is important. This process is conditioned by one’s role identity and how one understands the world. Entrepreneurs develop mental models or cognitive maps of how the environment works (Hill and Levenhagen 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005; Brännback and Carsrud 2009; Leitch and Harrison 2016) with respect to the business environment. For an entrepreneur creating a venture, the external business environment is new, and the entrepreneur is, in a sense, initially an outsider. An immigrant is an outsider in their new host country, and a person belonging to a native minority is an outsider in relation to the majority population. The environment is a representation of multiple social contexts and can be seen as an external entrepreneurial enabler as much as a constraint. Sensemaking is a vehicle for navigating multiple contexts. Thus, in this study, we seek to answer the following research question: How does sensemaking with respect to perceived multiple role identities and linguistic contextual embeddedness impact the entrepreneurial actions of various types of minorities?

By focusing on the multiple role identities of different minorities, we contribute to the research on entrepreneurial identity, most of which is relatively recent (Shepherd and Haynie 2009b; Fauchart and Gruber 2011; Powell and Baker 2014; Alsos et al. 2016; Leitch and Harrison 2016); however, the field is rapidly growing (Mmbaga et al. 2020). Across the existing body of research, it is agreed that understanding the role of the identity of owner-founders informs us about who the actors are, what they do, what motivates them, and how they might behave. The research shows that entrepreneurs enact multiple role identities, which, in turn, affects the various ways in which an entrepreneur operates. Role identity theory is relevant to venture creation and the behavioral expectations associated with such

identities. Roles are enacted through social relationships and carry behavioral expectations in terms of how the identity of an individual within a society is perceived and how they are expected to behave (Stryker and Burke 2000; Leitch and Harrison 2016; Wry and York 2017; Gruber and MacMillan 2017; Pan, Gruber, and Binder 2019; Mmbaga et al. 2020).

This study contributes to the knowledge of entrepreneurship in several ways. First, it is a study of the interaction between multiple role identities (as a minority, member of an ethnic group, and entrepreneur) and organizational emergence and development. Regarding immigrant minorities, this study contributes to the discussion on how immigrants identify with both their host and home countries and how this context “facilitates immigrants in identifying and exploiting economic opportunities” (Dheer 2018, 606). Second, it provides a response to a request for more studies focusing on the relationship between the micro and macro levels of entrepreneurship (Dabić et al. 2020). This study is focused on how the entrepreneurial “self” and linguistic contextual embeddedness interact to impact the sensemaking of entrepreneurial motivations. The individual level of role identities blended with linguistic embeddedness reflects a mixed embeddedness approach (see Brieger and Gielnik 2021), which has been cited in the literature and framed as the “European contribution” to the field of immigrant entrepreneurship (Dabić et al. 2020, 33). Finally, we examine how entrepreneurs balance operations in multiple contexts, which adds to the literature on the mixed embeddedness of entrepreneurship (Kloosterman et al. 1999). Like the results of previous studies (Hechavarria et al. 2018; Brännback et al. 2014), ours show that role identities and linguistic contextual embeddedness are crucial in entrepreneurs’ sensemaking of their motivations and opportunities.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, we present the theoretical background of role identity and sensemaking in entrepreneurship generally and in relation to immigrants and linguistic embeddedness specifically. Second, we outline the methods used to

achieve our research aims. Finally, we introduce and discuss the empirical findings and provide concluding remarks, including the contributions and implications of the study.

2. Role identity and sensemaking

2.1. Identity research in entrepreneurship

While research on identity and identity processes is among the most prominent and contested work in management studies (Watson 2008; Brown 2015), the research on entrepreneurial identity is relatively recent (Fauchart and Gruber 2011; Powell and Baker 2014; Leitch and Harrison 2016); however, the field is rapidly growing (Mmbaga et al. 2020). Identities are critical to new venture creation, as they reveal explicit and implicit patterns of entrepreneurial cognition and entrepreneurial motivations, passion, and intentions (Krueger et al. 2000; Carsrud and Brännback 2011; Bullough et al. 2014; Brännback and Carsrud 2016; Bullough and Renko 2017; Cardon et al. 2017; Clark and Harrison 2019). Understanding identities thus yields explanations regarding why and how entrepreneurs act and how they remain resilient in their pursuit of success even when it is not imminent. That is, identities form a vehicle to transcend entrepreneurial traits and understanding them allows us to acknowledge that an entrepreneur may simultaneously enact multiple identities while pursuing a venture.

Identities are fluid, multi-level, multidimensional constructs that cut across multiple disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, political science, and history (Powell and Baker 2014). Identity theories originate from sociology's identity theory (Stryker and Burke 2000) and social psychology's social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Their main tenet is that individuals have multiple identities, as they have multiple roles and identify with multiple groups (Powell and Baker 2014). In social identity theory, individuals can identify with a nationality, ethnicity, or other groups of people, such as entrepreneurs. Identities can arise from self-categorization and from what others identify as the prototypical behavior of an

individual belonging to a specific social group. In social identity theory, interaction is neither required nor excluded. Our study is anchored to identity theory.

In identity theory, individuals identify with a role derived from relationships and interactions with others. From a cognitive social psychology perspective, identity thus forms a cognitive map with internally stored information and meanings that serve as frameworks for making sense of experiences and behaviors. For some, identity refers to the culture of people, with no distinction made between identity and ethnicity. Within venture creation, role identity theory is relevant, as entrepreneurial actions and identities are enacted through social relationships and carry behavioral expectations as to who an individual is and what they are expected to do (Stryker and Burke 2000; Powell and Baker 2014; Leitch and Harrison 2016; Wry and York 2017; Gruber and MacMillan 2017; Pan, Gruber, and Binder 2019; Mmbaga et al. 2020).

The common understanding is that identities are constructed over time, starting from early childhood. Each identity has a behavioral standard that reflects commonly understood expectations of how it should be enacted. Enacting identity-consistent behaviors generates feelings of distinctiveness and competence, whereas inconsistencies may lead to a breakdown in social ties. Thus, entrepreneurs may enact various role identities depending on the situation. According to identity theory, groups are formed by interrelated individuals based on how behaviors are enacted through the roles embedded in them (e.g., nationality, language, ethnicity, profession, etc.) (Terry, Hogg, and White 1999; Shepherd and Haynie 2009a, 2009b; Wry and York 2017). This paper is focused on the multiplicity of role identities and the sensemaking process between them and how entrepreneurial motives and activities are shaped in the process.

2.2. Immigrant and native minority entrepreneurs

Immigrants form minorities within their host countries. However, they may not be the only minorities that reside in them. Many countries have native minorities, some of which may have the status of an *official minority*. In some countries they do not have an official status.

The traditional view of immigrant entrepreneurship is that of a “necessity entrepreneur” (Elo et al. 2018). It is commonly argued that a lack of language skills among immigrants is one of the primary reasons for limited employment options, resulting in the need to create a venture to earn a living (Jones-Evans, Thompson, and Kwong 2011; Dabić et al. 2020). Thus, minority entrepreneurs are usually seen as providing services to members of the same ethnic group (Bates et al. 2007).

Language may be a defining factor for native minority entrepreneurs (along with race and ethnicity) (Bates et al. 2018). While researchers often combine native minorities and immigrants into a group of “minority entrepreneurs,” Bates et al. (2018) state that minority and immigrant entrepreneurship should be viewed as distinct subfields due to their differing linguistic abilities and proficiency. In many cases, language is also connected to geographic location. Often, native minorities tend to live in specific regions of a country for historical reasons and may have a deeply rooted reluctance to move to other areas.

There are numerous qualities that immigrant and native minority groups share, but there are also important differences. These can include racial makeup, professional experience, country of education, level of education, language proficiency, level of identification with another country, social capital, level of integration, access to start-up capital, knowledge of the legal system, target market, country of origin of employees, and level of perceived discrimination (cf. Chrysostome 2010; Robertson and Grant 2016). These factors also apply to native minority entrepreneurs and are determinants of linguistic and social contextual embeddedness, which impact the role identities and sensemaking of

entrepreneurial endeavors. Depending on a person's role identity, various factors may determine their degree of linguistic embeddedness, which, in turn, impacts how their role identity as an entrepreneur will evolve through the decisions related to creating a venture, which can include deciding what kind of venture to create, which target markets to enter, which kinds of funding options to pursue, whom to employ, and, ultimately, how to ensure the survival of the venture.

2.3 Linguistic and contextual embeddedness and sensemaking

Entrepreneurial activities are embedded in social, institutional, economic, cultural, spatial, and temporal contexts (Welter 2011; Brännback and Carsrud 2016; Müller and Korsgaard 2018). This mixed embeddedness approach reflects the need to consider the multidimensional character of immigrant entrepreneurship and the interrelation between the socio-economic aspects of immigration and factors such as cultural integration and social capital (Dabić et al. 2020; Kloosterman et al. 1999). Entrepreneurship studies still require more insights into the interconnection between the micro and macro levels of analysis, which are relevant when analyzing the complex nature of immigrant entrepreneurship (Dabić et al. 2020).

Sensemaking is reflective of the environment and encompasses the crucial interconnection between the micro and macro levels, indicating that making sense of one's experience is inseparable from the environment/context within which an individual acts (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005; Mills, Thurlow, and Mills 2010). Entrepreneurial activities comprise a continuous sensemaking process throughout the venture creation process. Sensemaking can be understood as “the way people make bets on ‘what is going on’ and what to do next” (Colville and Pye 2010, 373). As a result of the enactment of the external environment, sensemaking of the real world is attributed with meaning and thereby leads to decisions as to how to position the firm in that environment.

While entrepreneurs frequently seek to distinguish between themselves and competitors, the human need for belongingness forces them to seek in-group approval by acting in accordance with their groups' norms (Shepherd and Haynie 2009a; Brändle et al. 2018). In the case of immigrant entrepreneurs, the need for belongingness may be even more pronounced because they have experienced a major change in their environment by leaving their home country (González-González and Bretones 2013). Consequently, there is a quality of dual embeddedness in their ventures, as they are simultaneously embedded in the home- and host-country contexts. Their embeddedness in the host country's context brings challenges, such as linguistic issues and lack of knowledge of the local culture, as well as the need to adapt to social, regulatory, and legal norms, which are crucial for the smooth establishment of a business (Joardar and Wu 2011; Kloosterman 2010; Zaheer 1995). Native minority entrepreneurs also experience a state of dual embeddedness, but it occurs within the minority and majority population contexts (Kloosterman 2010).

The level of embeddedness within a country's context is different for native minority entrepreneurs because of their common history, the recognition of their language as official one, and their knowledge of local norms. In turn, embeddedness in home country or minority linguistic context may bring the challenge of an inappropriate identity and being identified with an out-group, which may lead to discrimination from the in-group (i.e., the majority population of the host country) (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Kloosterman 2010; González-González and Bretones 2013). This is sometimes also referred to as the "liability of foreignness" (Zaheer 1995; Joardar and Wu 2011). In addition, new ventures also face the "liability of newness," which threatens their survival (Stinchcombe 1965; Freeman, Carroll, and Hannan 1983). Regardless of the limitations of societal in- and out-groups and the forms of discrimination they respectively face, immigrant entrepreneurs can exploit helpful connections in their home countries and among their family members and friends (Elo 2019).

It is possible to examine how entrepreneurs make sense of venture creation and development by analyzing the metaphors and idioms they apply in their narratives. Understanding sensemaking through language is important for entrepreneurship research, since it enables us to understand socially situated cognition elements (Mitchell, Randolph-Seng, and Mitchell 2011), such as identification with multiple identities or embeddedness within several social and situational contexts.

3. Data and method

3.1. Data context

The empirical data cover two groups of minorities in Finland: (i) Russian-speaking immigrants, the largest immigrant minority group in Finland, and (ii) Swedish-speaking Finns, a native minority with official status. Finland has two official national languages, Finnish and Swedish, and approximately 6% of the population speaks Swedish as its mother tongue, thus forming a minority. Swedish is the official language of an official minority. The Russian language does not have official status and is also a minority language. The group of Swedish-speaking Finns in this study is geographically distinctive, as they are all located on the Åland Islands.

The Åland Islands is a group of islands in the southwest area of Finland, which gained a special international status in the Treaty of Paris in 1856, ending the Crimean War. In 1917, Finland gained independence from the Russian Empire, and, in 1921, the League of Nations resolved the status of Åland's constitutional affiliation as part of Finland, classifying it as neutral and demilitarized. The population of the Åland Islands was 30,000. The official language of the islands was Swedish. Approximately 87% now speak Swedish as their mother tongue, and proficiency in Finnish is weak. Most of the 2,100 businesses on the

Åland Islands are small or micro firms, 600 of which are agricultural enterprises; only 20 firms employ more than 50 persons.

Russian-speaking immigrants form the largest permanent immigrant group in Finland and represent approximately 1.6% of the total Finnish population. Although the immigration of Russians to Finland surged during the 1990s, Russians have a long history in the country, with Finland acting as a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire from 1809-1917 (Tanner and Söderling 2016). Russian, despite not having official status, is the third most spoken language in Finland, after Finnish and Swedish, with most Russian-speaking immigrants residing in the eastern part of the country. Russian immigrants form one of the biggest groups of immigrant entrepreneurs in Finland (Fornaro 2018).

3.2. Method

Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with eight Russian immigrant entrepreneurs (Respondents 1-8), who resided and had businesses either in the Helsinki metropolitan area or in Southwest Finland, and seven Swedish-speaking entrepreneurs, who resided and did business in the Åland Islands (Respondents 9-15). The specific characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. To be selected for the study, the respondents had to have a business in Finland. The Russian entrepreneurs had to have been born outside of Finland, and the Swedish-speaking minority participants had to have a business in the Åland Islands and speak Swedish as their mother tongue. Some of the respondents were recruited through snowball sampling, whereas others were found through researchers' connections. The number of interviews was deemed appropriate because, during data collection, the researchers began to receive similar answers from the respondents; therefore, it became evident that the data-saturation point had been reached (Saunders et al. 2018).

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents

No	Immigrant or minority status	Gender	Age	Location	Type of business	Size of business	Time in Finland (years)	Experience of entrepreneurship in Finland	Country of education	Host country language proficiency	Target market
<i>Russian-speaking interviewees</i>											
1	Immigrant	Male	30-44	Helsinki area	Business consulting	Microenterprise	22	8 years	Russia (school) + Finland (higher)	Functional	Mainstream
2	Immigrant	Female	30-44	Helsinki area	High tech	Microenterprise	14	3 years	Russia (school) + Finland (higher)	Functional	Mainstream
3*	Immigrant	Female	30-44	Turku	Reselling	Microenterprise	9	3 years	Russia		Mainstream
4*	Immigrant	Male	45-60	Turku	Reselling	Microenterprise	12	12 years	Russia	Limited	Mainstream
5	Immigrant	Female	30-44	Helsinki area	Retail (clothing)	Microenterprise	5	3 years	Russia	Limited	Mainstream/Ethnic
6	Immigrant	Male	30-44	Helsinki area	Dentistry	Microenterprise	2	2 years	Israel	Limited	Mainstream
7	Immigrant	Female	30-44	Helsinki area	IT services, consulting	Microenterprise	9	5 years	Russia	Average	Ethnic
8	Immigrant	Female	30-44	Turku	R&D of medical devices	Microenterprise	9	4 years	Russia + Finland (PhD)	Average	Mainstream
<i>Swedish-speaking Finns</i>											
9	Minority	Male	45-60	Åland islands	Solar power and event industry	Microenterprise	N/R	4 years	Finland	Limited	Ethnic/Mainstream
10	Minority	Female	30-44	Åland islands	Dentistry	Microenterprise	7	4 years	Sweden	None	Ethnic/Mainstream
11	Minority	Male	45-60	Åland islands	ICT industry	Microenterprise	N/R	More than 30 years	Finland	Functional	Ethnic/Mainstream

12	Minority	Male	45-60	Åland islands	Dentistry	Microenterprise	N/R	25-30 years	Finland	Functional	Ethnic/Mainstream
13	Minority	Female	45-60	Åland islands	Journalism and writing	Microenterprise	N/R	20 years	Finland	Limited	Ethnic/Mainstream
14	Minority	Male	45-60	Åland islands	Restaurant industry	Microenterprise	N/R	4 years	Finland	Functional	Ethnic/Mainstream
15	Minority	Male	45-60	Åland islands	Creative industry	Microenterprise	30	20 years	Finland	Functional	Ethnic

Interviews lasting from one to two hours were conducted in the native language of the respondents. Conducting interviews in a respondent's native language offers more subtle insights and richer answers, and it allows respondents to express deeper emotions (Welch and Piekkari 2006). The interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview guide with specific topics. The interview guide acted as a conversation starter, as it included predefined topics rather than a strict protocol, thus allowing the respondents to expand on comments and add to the richness of the responses. The interview guide covered topics such as entrepreneurial characteristics, education, motivations for starting a business in Finland, challenges in establishing or leading a business, attitudes of others toward their business, prejudices faced, language challenges, and interpersonal communication with business partners. The topics covered in the interview guide were based on the theoretical background discussed in Section 2. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the analysis was conducted based on the respondents' native language. In this case, the researchers who conducted the interviews and analysis were also Russian immigrants to Finland and a Swedish-speaking Finn living in the Åland Islands. This ensured contextual knowledge and enhanced the credibility of the findings. Selected quotes were translated for the purpose of presenting the findings and triangulating the data through perspectives on the issue from various investigators (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

The analysis was performed in two steps. First, the interviews were read and any text addressing the role identities of the entrepreneurs was extracted (Table 2). Second, a metaphor analysis was conducted according to the criteria of the Praggeljaz Group (2007). Our focus on in-text metaphor identification corresponds to the call in management research for more inductive metaphor identification in language-in-use (Tosey, Lawley, and Meese 2014). In-text metaphor identification is especially useful for obtaining a deeper view of the respondents' sensemaking of experiences and concepts (Gioia et al. 1994; Tosey, Lawley,

and Meese 2014; Ivanova-Gongne & Törnroos, 2017). Like the Praggeljaz Group (2007), we treat idioms in one group as metaphors. Idioms are metaphorical by nature, represent expressions longer than one word, and often have stable meanings (Glucksberg et al. 2001). In the findings, metaphors and idioms are highlighted in bold in the interview quotes. After the metaphors had been identified, they were interpreted in relation to the entire context of the interview stories. The metaphors revealed the sensemaking processes of the interviewees.

4. Findings

4.1. *Who is an entrepreneur and what do they do?*

For Russian immigrant entrepreneurs, the central role identities were risk-taking, ability to cope with uncertainty, ability to respond quickly, perseverance, innovation, a constant search for new ideas, expansion, and profit. An entrepreneur was described as an “athlete” or “fighter.” The constant search for new ideas was described as “hunger.” Russian immigrant entrepreneurs also sought to continuously expand their businesses to earn more profits. Without profits, entrepreneurial activity was considered pointless, like sitting in a swamp.

“An entrepreneur should have power of will. That is, an expression of will, *the spirit of an athlete*, in some sense, a *fighter’s spirit*. One way or another, it *is a fight*... Also, it is preferable for an entrepreneur to be an example for others, he/she should really *be an engine*.” (Respondent 1)

“For me an entrepreneur is a person who is *constantly hungry*, he has a constant hunger, is on a constant search for ideas and the realization of these ideas.” (Respondent 2)

“I understand entrepreneurship as doing something for yourself, for your sake and to gain profit for yourself, of course. Entrepreneurship is, in the first place, about gaining profit and *not just passing the time pleasantly*... if it is just about filling time or doing something you love, it is a hobby.” (Respondent 7)

“This is entrepreneurship according to me... always strive to expand your business, *not sit in a swamp...*” (Respondent 3)

While the Russian immigrants’ answers correspond to the stereotypical view of an entrepreneur, they also convey the typical perception of Russians as opportunists (Ivanova-Gongne and Torkkeli 2018) with the ability to live in a turbulent environment. Likewise, risk-taking and the ability to cope with uncertainty are common characteristics of the entrepreneurial role identity in the Swedish-speaking minority, but the perceptions of risk and uncertainty are different, which corresponds to how Russian immigrant entrepreneurs perceived Finnish ones as being less willing to take risks and more willing to live with what they had rather than initiating new, risky endeavors to expand their businesses. Moreover, Swedish speaking Finns’ reasons for becoming entrepreneurs were broader and reflected the idea of a greater cause: independence, flexibility, and environmental sustainability. Following the social identity classification by Fauchart and Gruber (2011), Russian immigrant entrepreneurs were Darwinians, whereas Swedish-speaking Finns were both Darwinians and Communitarians.

“Uncertainty is always there and cannot be affected; regarding risk, on the other hand, is up to you how you approach it.” (Respondent 14)

“*Uncertainty and risk are part of the same family.* Through uncertainty, there is also some risk. Uncertainty is something you feel, and risk is more concrete. If you feel secure in what you do, you tend to take greater risks.” (Respondent 10)

“When I started my business, I did not know if I would have any money after two weeks. Most people do not like this feeling. I was willing to live with continuous uncertainty. The biggest risk I took was with the time I spent on my project.” (Respondent 11)

“When developing my event business, I started with wanting to avoid affecting the environment negatively, leaving as little footprint as possible on the planet. Then, I created a platform for people to meet in a sustainable way.” (Respondent 9)

“You can create a business based on anything. If you do not have any morals, it is easy. So, in my mind, everything should be motivated by a bigger cause. First, identify a bigger cause and a business idea. Then, combine the two.” (Respondent 11)

4.2. Linguistic embeddedness

Linguistic contextual embeddedness plays a crucial integrative role in Russians’ sensemaking of their host country’s context. The respondents who were less integrated into their host country appeared to lack language skills, lacked education in the host country, and mostly operated within ethnic or international markets. Insufficient knowledge of the language was perceived by Russian respondents as almost synonymous with being unable to blend into society and with facing discrimination.

“We are in a situation, in which we, here in Finland, are limited due to knowledge of only the English language because Finns ***do not make contact with the English language.*** They might speak English, but they do not want to deal with anyone who speaks English... I think that, here in Finland, they have a strong monopoly, so they ***only deal with “our kind of people,”*** meaning that they only buy from Finns.” (Respondent 3)

While most of the respondents spoke the Finnish language on a conversational level, their command of it was insufficient for the purposes of conducting business. Entrepreneurs who had business partners fluent in Finnish (not necessarily Finnish by nationality) had an easier time navigating in the Finnish business environment. Other respondents also felt that to conduct business with Finns successfully, they needed to hire persons who spoke fluent Finnish to maintain relationships with partners and customers.

Other Russian entrepreneurs faced problems because they were unable to receive important information due to language barriers, and they, therefore, faced difficulties related to documentation and other formal issues.

“I came in like *a blind cat*, even though I had a business before and knew how to conduct business. Of course, the *language hit me like a hammer*, and I did not know how to speak it. I signed contracts without understanding them, because of which I suffered a lot in the end... That’s why currently I prefer for contracts to be solely in English, which is also acceptable in Finland.” (Respondent 6)

Subsequently, one of the interviewed entrepreneurs created an association of Russian-speaking entrepreneurs to enable them to share necessary information concerning doing business in Finland.

“There were difficulties, like when we did renovations; the first renovation, the first shop, turned out to be very expensive for us because we did not know many things [due to detailed information being only in Finnish]... That’s why I decided to create a union of Russian-speaking entrepreneurs. I did that so that *people could socialize/develop a community*.” (Respondent 5).

Unlike the Russians, the Swedish-speaking respondents from the Åland Islands faced few problems related to language. Since Finland has two official languages, services from state authorities, that is, information about the tax system or any other official aspect of the governing system, are offered in both languages (as in Canada). When dealing with official issues, the Swedish-speaking minority does not have problems related to language. Most Swedish-speaking Finns are bilingual. However, for those living on the Åland Islands, the situation is somewhat different, as 87% of the population primarily speaks Swedish and many people are not bilingual. Their skills are sometimes limited to the point that they prefer to speak English. Nevertheless, most of the Åland-based respondents felt that the Finnish

language was not a problem for venture creation in Finland. They were clearly more linguistically embedded in Finnish society than the Russian immigrants.

“Regarding the language, when contacting Finnish businesspeople, I could not present myself as a person from Finland, since then they expected me to speak Finnish with them. So, I said that I was from Sweden.” (Respondent 9)

“To have an established business in Finland, I did not feel any problems or see it as difficult. I do not see Finnish as a problem. *I never had the patience to feel outside.*” (Respondent 12)

“I feel that it has been uncomplicated to establish a business in Finland. However, my market is the Swedish community, which limits business opportunities.” (Respondent 13)

4.3. Social embeddedness: social capital and relationships

Role identities are enacted through social relationships. The ability to create social relationships becomes a source of social capital for an individual (Lee and Black 2017). Belonging to a group and socializing provide opportunities and create networks that enable interaction within a specific sector of society (Shepherd and Haynie 2009a; Brändle et al. 2018). One can find various types of social activities to provide a minority group with a network and a platform for business development and other entrepreneurial activities.

Developing social capital and cultivating the right relationships are important to Russian entrepreneurs. They actively seek ways to generate social capital as a means of becoming embedded in Finnish society. This became the business idea for one entrepreneur, who leveraged the benefits of social capital. She organized seminars for Russian-speaking entrepreneurs on how to do business in Finland. Another entrepreneur created an informal community of Russian-speaking entrepreneurs, which she described as a close circle of people.

“We have *a circle of people* who have interacted with and helped each other very much. Really, we have told each other things that you will not read about anywhere. You can gain such knowledge based only on your own experience.” (Respondent 5)

In terms of employees and business partners, most Russian respondents dealt with either Russian or non-Finnish employees. For some entrepreneurs, it was a way to maintain the Russian sensibility of their company, while others had problems attracting Finnish employees.

“I had a job announcement posted [for a long time], but only foreigners from various countries applied for it. Not a single Finn came, and that was strange. Because our company has a good record, *we don't have* any bad reviews or a *bad name*, that is, nobody has said anything like “they don't pay here” or “they lie here.” We *do everything by the book* and try our best, *but still, making contact/a connection* with Finns *is very hard.*” (Respondent 6)

Those lucky enough to have a Finnish business partner to boost their social capital felt that they were more successful. However, Respondent 4 had misunderstandings with his Finnish partner based on differences in their mentality and the reluctance of the Finnish partner to expand the business, whereas Respondent 1, who was more integrated into Finnish society and spoke Finnish fluently, felt a better connection with his Finnish partners and customers than with his Russian ones.

“To be honest, I can say that most, if not all, of my partnerships in Finland *have already grown into friendships*. I do not know if this is good or bad... In Russia, everything is different. In Russia, every partner *keeps their distance*, despite having familiarity and good relationship. There is no such *feeling of brotherhood* there.” (Respondent 1)

While the entrepreneurs on the Åland Islands perceived themselves as socially embedded in Finnish society, they did not view themselves as part of the Finnish

entrepreneurial society; rather, they primarily identified themselves as part of the Åland and Swedish minority entrepreneurial society. Thus, there was a disconnect. Similarly, Russian entrepreneurs, and one of the Swedish-speaking Finns, faced challenges to becoming part of Finnish entrepreneurial society that were rooted in language. This resulted in the creation of a Swedish-speaking entrepreneurship association.

“I have been part of the Finnish business society because I was on the central committee of the Finnish Entrepreneurship Association. However, the members did not give a damn about the Swedish speaking. It did not work out, so we started our own Swedish organization. The majority’s view of the Swedish was negative, and they thought that the Swedish speaking “upper class” from Helsinki produced the Swedish entrepreneurs in Finland. There was cohesiveness between the Swedish-speaking people. Being a Swedish-speaking person in Finland, you cannot afford to be ashamed, and you have to push forward, not just along the normal path. (Respondent 11)

A lack of social capital and Finnish-language proficiency had direct consequences for each entrepreneur’s level of identification with the host country and created multiple role identities that were simultaneously present and that sometimes conflicted. Some of the Russian respondents identified more with their home country (Russia). This tendency was not derived from the entrepreneurial role identity, but it had consequences for conducting business in Finland. The desire to expand one’s business and make an active commitment to it was an element of the entrepreneurial role identity and of being Russian. The Russian immigrant entrepreneurs sought constant development and expansion.

Most of the Russian entrepreneurs perceived themselves as “*a person of the world*” and said that they had acquired the ability to “*absorb various cultures and cook in those cultures*” They also felt more at ease in Finland than in Russia in terms of everyday life, and they felt that they did not face any special challenges when adapting to the local context despite not speaking the language fluently.

“Develop! I want to develop! I want to gain a cent more; it is interesting for me to *grow as a person* and make achievements. What is the point in going to work, working all day, and going home at four o’clock even though you have not done anything new? You have not learned anything... I cannot cope with this here! The mentality is killing me! People do not want to do anything here. This kills me because I understand that without people business will not work.” (Respondent 6)

“When talking about who I feel myself to be, I do not have any clear feeling of it... When I came here, I often heard the question ‘How hard is for you to adapt?’ I did not have such a period [of adaptation] at all, and now am not having it, even though I *know only five words in Finnish... We do not live in a detached way* even though we have a big community of Russian-speaking people where we communicate, of course. But I am always happy to communicate with the locals.” (Respondent 5)

In contrast to the Russian immigrants, the Swedish-speaking minority is part of the history of Finnish society. They identified themselves as Finnish, with Finland being their country of origin. However, the respondents did not view themselves as “Finnish entrepreneurs.” Instead, they identified themselves as “Åland entrepreneurs” as part of Finland and as “Nordic entrepreneurs.”

The identification of Swedish-speaking Finns as a minority group is strong and affects the way they see their identity within the Finnish business context. Thus, one of the respondents did not feel that there was any need to identify outside the minority group.

“I feel like an Ålander – Swedish-speaking. I do not think that much about belonging to anything. In this case, the group from Åland. That is what I am, regardless of who I turn to or speak to. But, then again, it is not that important or a vital issue.” (Respondent 13)

4.4. Perceived discrimination

All the Russian immigrant entrepreneurs felt discriminated against by Finnish society in some form. Most mentioned that they felt that Finns were reluctant to do business with them due to their origin. In some cases, the respondents had gained the trust of the locals, whereas,

in other cases, it led to the demise of their business. Issues with the language and linguistic embeddedness were critical, as, regardless of their fluency in Finnish, they could not hide their Russian accent. The respondents felt that this was a disadvantage. The Russian role identity was, in one case, directly dysfunctional. One of the respondents had a Finnish business partner who had not officially registered their partnership because Russian origin carried a stigma that could affect the company's image.

“Because yet again, my Finn, he has not fully registered me as an owner and has kept it all on some papers... Finns do not want to officially register Russians with their businesses. They tell you, do not you worry, everything will be okay, it is for the best, because if they see that there are Russians here, we will have problems, and if they do not see it, there will be no problems. The government and tax office will see that there are Russians in the company, and we will get attitude from them, so *it is better if there is no Russian listed on the papers.*” (Respondent 4)

He further elaborated that he perceived the behavior of his partner as a Finnish way to avoid including Russians in the ownership of companies.

Other Russian entrepreneurs experienced similar forms of discrimination from state authorities and financial institutions, which included being denied residence permits on the grounds of investing in business and longer times for registering their companies unless they disguised their Russian identity.

“We sometimes heard phrases like ‘*clothes of Putin*’ in our shop. So, it is obvious that people have some associations and fear, sometimes on the level of respect, sometimes on the level of I don’t even know what... But there were, of course, certain prejudices, such as, when we were beginning the business, the people in the bank with whom we worked [where we got our loan] said ‘*don’t say that you’re a Russian brand, say that you are a European brand.*’ This extended to recommending that we not speak Russian in the shop. So, we tried this for maybe a week, but then I said, ‘That’s all, let us end this nonsense.’” (Respondent 5)

“As a Russian immigrant, *you are in a certain box*. I mean it does not matter if you are mopping floors in a bar or if you have your own company. You will still be an immigrant from Russia that lives in a predetermined Russian box and there is an array of things related to it... I, for example, try to avoid any discussion about where I came from, that is, I try not to emphasize it. It is a negative factor rather than a positive one.”

(Respondent 8)

The entrepreneurs who experienced discrimination had businesses that either dealt with the mainstream market or both the mainstream and ethnic markets. The entrepreneurs who served primarily the Russian ethnic market did not feel any discrimination, which was perceived as being due to their embeddedness within a specific ethnic context such that the role identity of being a Russian had little or no impact.

“I have not faced any prejudice in the business environment. I should say once more that the nature of my business is such that it presumes that I am from Russia and that I initially coached Russian-speaking people from Russia. That is why no one expects that I will have Finnish roots or have lived here all my life. People only expect that I will know how businesses work.” (Respondent 7)

Contrary to the Russian immigrants, most of the Swedish-speaking Finns did not perceive any prejudice in their business lives, but they had such experiences in their private lives. However, as a minority in Finland, some of the Swedish-speaking Finns felt a need to adjust their way of communication and running a business.

“Not on the Åland Islands and not directly from a language-related point of view. However, Finnish Finland sometimes has difficulty communicating with you as a Swedish-speaking person.” (Respondent 15)

Respondent 11, on the other hand, found that the language barrier was a big motivator for him to start a business in the first place. Respondent 11 pointed out that being flexible is important, as is avoiding being too “cocky,” and that one must instead change or adjust the way they communicate with the majority. This was considered a result of the view that there

are many people who do not like minorities, whether a person is Swedish-speaking or from Åland. On the other hand, Respondent 11 found that there were benefits to the situation in terms of personal development because of the need to find creative solutions while having a sensitive approach toward the majority.

5. Discussion

This study was aimed at investigating how various role identities (as a member of a minority or ethnicity and an entrepreneur) and linguistic and social contextual embeddedness impact entrepreneurial activities. The perspective on entrepreneurship was split between two minority groups within the same country: immigrant and native minority entrepreneurs. The results show that both role identity and linguistic and social contextual embeddedness play a crucial role in entrepreneurs' sensemaking of their motivations and their subsequent entrepreneurial actions.

We found that the Russian entrepreneurs responded using metaphors, which were almost entirely absent in the responses of the entrepreneurs from the Åland Islands. The metaphors show constant sensemaking due to a lack of linguistic and social embeddedness. They also show the presence of multiple role identities, which, at times, are problematic for entrepreneurs. Again, this is not the case for the Swedish-speaking entrepreneurs. Among the members of a native minority, whose language has an official status, they benefit from linguistic embeddedness, making the kind of sensemaking processes identified among Russian entrepreneurs unnecessary.

Table 2. Determinants of role identities

Determinant of role identities	Immigrant Entrepreneur	Native Minority Entrepreneur
Professional experience	Limited to good	Limited to good
Country of education	Home and/or host country	Home country
Level of education	High school to university	High school to university
Access to start-up capital	Limited	Limited to good
Knowledge of legal system	Limited	Good
Linguistic embeddedness	Poor	Good
Target market	Mainstream/international	Local/international
Identification with host country	Limited but with strong identification with the host country	Fully integrated and identified with the local community
Social capital	Limited, mostly co-ethnic	Strong, existing minority and/or majority
Country of employees	Co-ethnic or foreign	Available workforce
Perceived discrimination	Strongly related to nationality and language	None

Most of the Russian immigrant entrepreneurs decided to create a venture because of the lack of other job opportunities. However, in terms of entrepreneurial identity, they either had a good professional experience, especially in entrepreneurship, or had both home and host country education, providing them with a more global outlook on business. Furthermore, their Russian role identity made them more proactive in seeking opportunities to expand their businesses. In some cases, this led to misunderstandings with local partners who were reluctant to be proactive. In this case, a lack of identification with the host country made

them more opportunity-oriented, contrary to the findings in the previous literature (e.g., Dana, Virtanen, and Barner-Rasmussen 2019; Chrysostome 2010).

However, their Russian role identity was a significant constraining factor, as there were behavioral expectations connected to that identity. For example, the distrust of and prejudices against Russians in Finnish society impacted the image of their businesses. At the same time, they clearly defined themselves as entrepreneurs whose purpose was to create wealth through profits, which corresponds with the opportunistic behaviors of managers in Russia (Ivanova-Gongne and Torkkeli 2018). This characteristic can be seen both as a Russian and entrepreneurial role identity.

Due to Swedish-speaking Finns' higher level of embeddedness in the Finnish linguistic context and greater job opportunities, the first step in becoming an entrepreneur was identifying an opportunity for a business venture. This reflects a broader motive than just "making money." Interestingly, flexibility and being able to focus on their specific skills were also part of their entrepreneurial role identity (Benz and Frey 2008; Parasuraman and Simmers 2001).

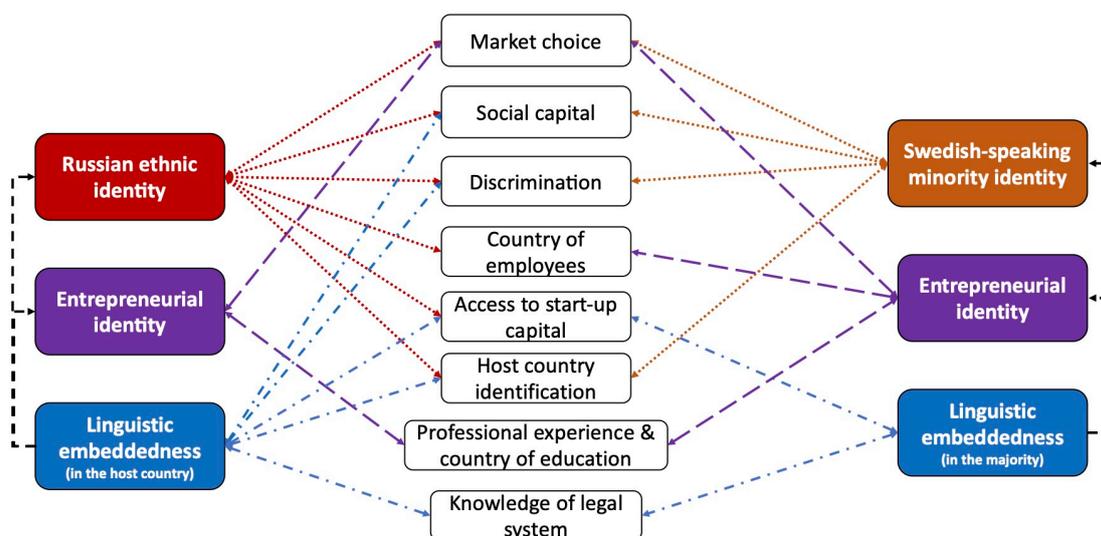


Figure 1. Interrelation between role identities, linguistic embeddedness, and identity factors

In terms of market choice, most Russian immigrant entrepreneurs focused on the mainstream market, which may be related to either 1) a desire to overcome the difficulties and/or prejudices associated with a Russian role identity or 2) the Russian entrepreneurial identity of constantly seeking opportunities and economic wealth. Establishing a venture and doing business led to several challenges. Limited language proficiency was the main obstacle in understanding the needed details and building broad native social capital. Even though half of the Russian interviewees spoke the Finnish language on a conversational level, in most cases, they were still limited in terms of understanding and speaking it at a professional level.

The Swedish-speaking minority did not face the same linguistic hurdles. They established a presence in the local, national, and international markets. Thus, identification with the minority community and language, to some extent, influenced their choice of market. The size of the business, the target market, and the ambition to grow or develop the company of the entrepreneur influenced which markets they targeted. This also included the neighboring market in Sweden (see Figure 1).

To conclude, while Russian immigrants' role identities led to an opportunistic path to entrepreneurship. They were significantly constrained by their Russian role identity, as they had limited linguistic embeddedness and embeddedness in Finnish society. Perceived discrimination often leads to efforts to disguise one's role identity. In general, Russian entrepreneurs have a clear understanding that they need to become embedded in the Finnish linguistic context to succeed with their ventures. They must conform to the norms and behavioral patterns in Finland.

The Swedish-speaking Finns on the Åland Islands did not believe that it was necessary to become embedded in Finnish mainland society. They felt they could choose whether to become embedded in Finnish business society. However, becoming part of the society meant that they had to communicate and conduct activities in the Finnish language

and adapt to the social structures and traditions of the Finnish majority. This hurdle was difficult to manage for some. In some cases, organizations were established for the minority group, and communication with Finnish society was, in some cases, accomplished using English. Due to their historical embeddedness in the mainland society and language, Swedish-speaking Finns' identity was not a negative factor in their sensemaking of opportunities in the market, as was the case for the Russian immigrants. On the contrary, they felt like their identity gave them more opportunities by allowing them to operate in both the Finnish and Swedish markets.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Theoretical contributions

The core research problem of this study was to understand how sensemaking with respect to perceived multiple role identities and linguistic contextual embeddedness impacts the entrepreneurial actions of various minorities. The findings show that minority and immigrant entrepreneurs constantly juggle several identities and contexts when attempting to succeed in the country where they operate. By reflecting how entrepreneurs balance operations in multiple contexts (Welter 2011; Carsrud, Brännback, and Harrison 2014; Welter, and Gartner 2016; Brännback and Carsrud 2016; Hechavarria et al. 2018), our findings contribute to entrepreneurship research on the contextual impact on entrepreneurial motivations (Carsrud and Brännback 2011; Brännback and Carsrud 2016; Welter 2011; Welter and Gartner 2016).

This study also expands our understanding of the relatively underexplored interaction between multiple role identities (as minority, member of an ethnic group, and entrepreneur) and organizational emergence and development (Leitch and Harrison 2016). For instance, the Russians' immigrant identity affected their entrepreneurial identity in both a negative and positive way by restricting access to start-up capital but encouraging them to be more

proactive and seek more opportunities. As in previous studies, the findings showed that both role identity and linguistic and social contextual embeddedness are crucial to entrepreneurs' sensemaking processes. Thus, this study also adds to the literature on mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman 1999) and highlights the relationship between the micro and macro levels of entrepreneurship (Dabić et al. 2020).

This study also contributes to the growing body of research on the role of language in entrepreneurship (e.g., Sui, Morgan, and Baum 2015; Hechavarria et al. 2018; Clarke and Cornelissen 2011). While, for Russian immigrants, embeddedness in the host country's linguistic context was often necessary for success in entrepreneurial actions, native Swedish minorities did not perceive the need to become embedded in the context. By examining linguistic and social contextual embeddedness in respondents' sensemaking processes, this research contributes to the interconnection of language and individual cognition as a fundamental aspect of socially situated cognition in entrepreneurship (Clarke and Cornelissen 2011).

The findings also show the distinct nature of native minority entrepreneurship in relation to immigrant entrepreneurship. Thus, this study contributes to fostering a better understanding of the multifaceted and contextually rich nature of entrepreneurship within a single country's environment (Welter 2011; Bates et al. 2018). While the literature on immigrant, ethnic, and minority entrepreneurship has received growing attention, it is still not part of mainstream research, which predominantly disregards the multiplicity of entrepreneurial identities and its impact on the entrepreneurial environment in various countries (Dheer and Lenartowicz 2018). Therefore, we call for better integration of such research into mainstream literature to improve the current conceptualization of everyday entrepreneurs (Welter and Gartner 2016).

Methodologically, the study is a response to a call for the use of more qualitative methods when it comes to the contextualization of entrepreneurship research (Welter 2011). We see inductive metaphor analysis (Tosey, Lawley, and Meese 2014) as an especially promising method for linking the micro and macro levels of entrepreneurial cognition and the multiple contexts in which they operate. The findings show that metaphors can showcase, for instance, the level of embeddedness in a certain context and the alternation between multiple identities.

6.2. Managerial and policy implications

By providing two distinct minority perspectives on entrepreneurship, the results may help entrepreneurs and policymakers understand the various challenges that entrepreneurs face when establishing and running a business. Advanced and professional knowledge of the local language is especially essential for maintaining successful entrepreneurial activities and overcoming the liability of foreignness. In turn, policymakers should provide greater support for minority entrepreneurship by providing full legal and financial information and advice concerning venture creation in the languages of the minority groups in their countries.

6.3. Limitations and further research suggestions

While the study is qualitative and interpretative, and the aim was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the focus issues, more research must be conducted on a larger sample for the results to be generalizable. In a broader sample, other minority groups could be included, such as immigrants and refugees who have arrived more recently. By including several minority groups, a deeper understanding of what forms these entrepreneurial networks and how various cultural backgrounds affect the likelihood of minority groups becoming embedded in entrepreneurial activities could be achieved. Furthermore, by including the majority's view (in this case, the Finnish speaking Finns), a broader understanding of the

situation for the minorities, including the background of the current situation, could be presented. To add to the complexity, some of the Swedish speaking Finns consider themselves bilingual and identify with both minority and majority groups. This study suggests avenues for reaching more generalizable conclusions about the influence of role identities and linguistic embeddedness on entrepreneurial activities. Apart from conducting, for example, a quantitative survey on a larger sample, research in the context of other countries with both native minority and immigrant communities could aid in expanding on the results of this study.

There are several other avenues for further research based on this study. Thus, researchers should examine whether there are differences between industries regarding minorities' role in the entrepreneurial context. For example, the shipping industry has traditionally employed members of the Swedish-speaking majority in Finland for historical reasons. Additional research is needed to advance knowledge of the role of language and multiculturalism in entrepreneurship (Hechavarria et al 2018; Brännback et al. 2014). This is a vital but still largely underestimated issue in both business and entrepreneurship practice and theory. We encourage more research to transcend contextual boundaries and reflect the multifaceted nature of everyday entrepreneurs' experiences.

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